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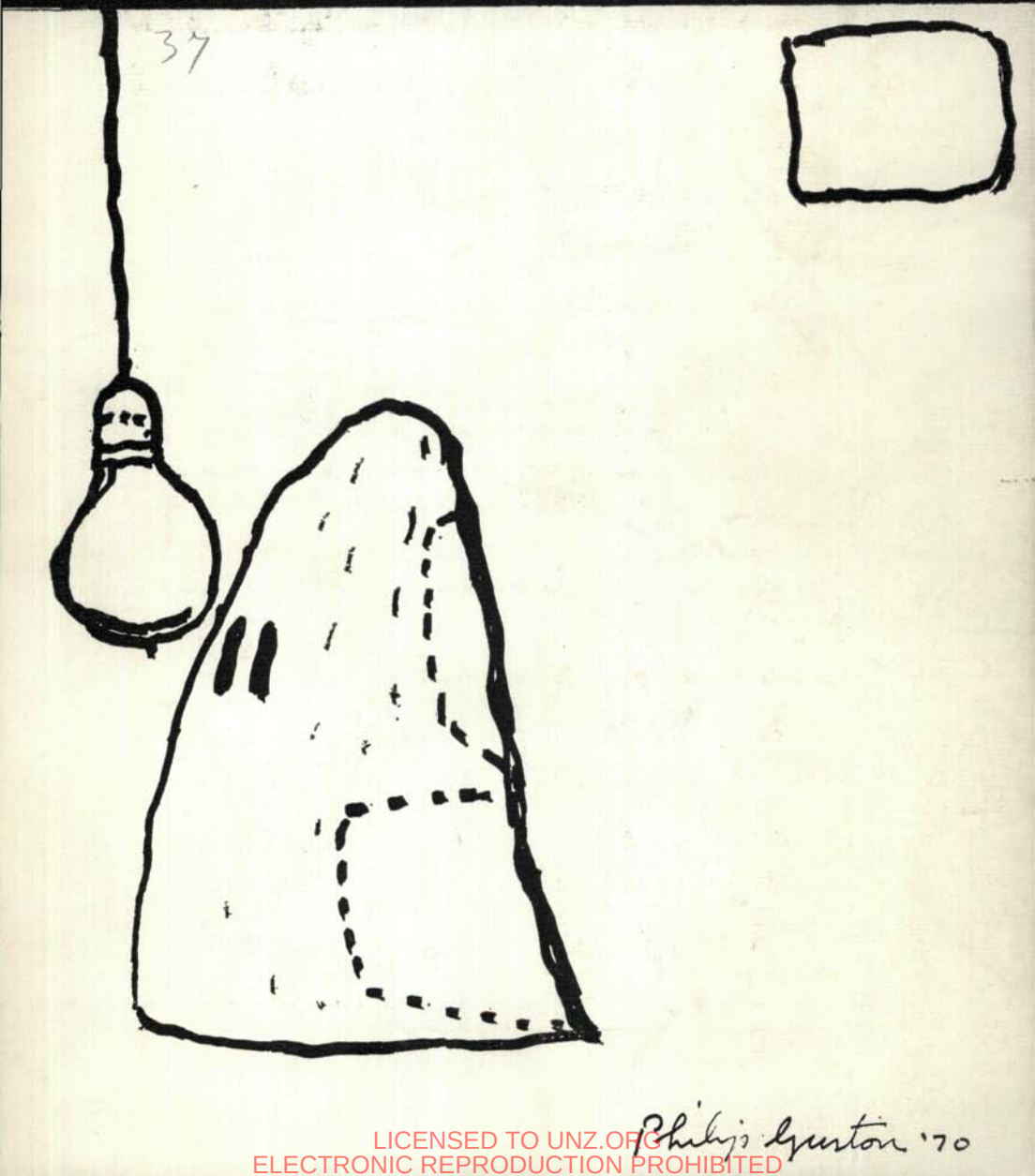

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Joyce Carol Oates

ONTOLOGICAL PROOF OF MY EXISTENCE

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

SHELLEY	*a girl of about eighteen or twenty*
PETER V.	*a man of indeterminate age*
SHELLEY'S FATHER	*a man in his forties*
MARTIN RAVEN	*a man in his thirties*

A room with a high ceiling, unfinished appearance, perhaps brick walls — painted white and peeling. A stark, cluttered, inhuman room, on the edge of nowhere, nothing. To the left, a window. To the right, a door. A few boxes, crates, anonymous clutter, a mattress on the floor to the left, a sink, a counter, a hot plate, a small cupboard at the rear.

SHELLEY *is lying on the mattress, without moving. A khaki-colored blanket over her. The stage is lit in a cold, impersonal, dreamlike way; there is something unreal about the lighting as well as the setting, as if it takes place at the lowest level of human vitality, at the point at which the human passes into the unhuman.*

SHELLEY *wakes. She moves slowly, gradually, coming to life. It is difficult for her to sit up because she is so drugged, so groggy. She shakes her head, trying to clear it. The lighting reflects her confusion. At first it isn't clear whether she is a boy or a girl — she is about twenty, extremely thin, with very short clipped hair, a face that is neuter, innocent, blank, raw, clothes that are anonymous and colorless, slacks and a wrinkled shirt.*

SHELLEY *gets to her feet with difficulty. She approaches the edge of the stage. As she speaks she seems to be waking up; after a certain point, her manner is excited, even a little manic. There is an unfocused, restless, jerky quality to her.*

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SHELLEY: In the next hour they are going to prove that I exist! The proof will be shown to me! Demonstrated here on this stage! . . . We are always being shown the proof of one thing or another. Magazines are filled with photographs and charts and graphs that prove things. Television is always proving the existence of people: they move their mouths and arms, they speak, they come alive, they are given names and they exist. Scientists have proved many things and brought them into existence. Chemicals are shaken in test tubes, atoms are exploded, X rays of our heads show all kinds of growths and designs, as intricate as snowflakes. It is all very interesting. It is educational. There are solar systems the size of your smallest fingernail, floating around in the air. There is the existence of God, in the universe. A slap in the face convinces you that certain other people exist. My head was banged on the floor over there (*pointing to a corner of the stage*) and it made me understand that the floor exists. One day I got very tall and the ceiling up there (*pointing to the ceiling*) brushed against the top of my head, so I knew that the ceiling existed also. I'm hungry.

SHELLEY *walks slowly about the stage, in a daze, looking for something to eat.*

SHELLEY: There's food in here somewhere. Where did he put it? I think I smell food. Is it under here? (*lifting some junk*) My head aches. I think it's because I haven't eaten. I ate the day before yesterday, but what about yesterday? I made my husband, Martin, something to eat yesterday, or maybe it was the day before yesterday. I wonder if he ate all of it, or did he leave some? Where is it? I smell food in here. . . . Something smells in here. Maybe it's food from years ago. My head aches but I'm not really hungry. My stomach is very tight and probably food couldn't squeeze into it. I don't like the smell in here. Too many people have lived in here. Now the building is condemned, I overheard Peter telling Martin that, I think I overheard him saying that. . . . *The building is condemned.* I do smell food, stale food! It's years old! The smells are proof that people once lived here. I can almost see those people in the air, the shapes of people, strangers. . . . (*she looks about, dreamily and with a sense of dread*) They are almost shaped out of the air. There are so many invisible people in the world. They are always crowding me, pushing against me . . . their elbows, their feet, their breaths in my face. . . . Visible or invisible they are always crowding me. They want to crowd us all, push off the edge

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of the world. . . . Where is Peter? He hasn't been up here for three days. I need Peter. He should return in the next hour. Peter can hold back all this crowd, all these people. He understands. I need him, I need medicine from him, help from him, I am in love with him and he gives me love. Sometimes he presses me flat against the floor, right against the floor, so that I can't move. Then he breathes into me. . . . My head aches. I can't see right. Are the corners of this room fixed right?

The people who will come in this room are: Peter V., my lover; my father, who is on his way here now; and another man who is a mystery, Martin Raven, my new husband. Three men, and myself. There is a crowd of men around me. (*she brushes at her hair with her hands, quickly, coquettishly*) I wonder if I'm still pretty? Peter forgot to bring a mirror up. He said he would, then he forgot. I have been in this room for a long time now; I don't go out. They don't let me out. I would hurt myself outside on the street, anyway . . . it's crowded out there, it's like an army marching and stomping up and down the street, somebody might knock me down. I don't think the door there is locked, but Peter V. told me never to leave and so I can't leave. He gave me absolute instructions ten days ago, or a month ago. I don't remember. If he hadn't forbidden me to leave I think I would leave . . . I'm hungry, I think I would leave . . . I would walk over to the door (*she walks to the door*), I would see if I could open it . . . (*she opens the door, which is not locked*) . . . and if it was unlocked I would leave. But it's locked. It's been locked for a month now. I can't get out.

SHELLEY *stands at the door, gazing out abstractly. She speaks in a singsong, monotonous voice, which gradually becomes more animated, more excited.*

SHELLEY: Outside this door there is a corridor. The plaster is falling down. I can see the top of a stairway. There are doors along the corridor — some of them are open. Some are closed. Listen! — is that someone crying? (*She listens. No sound.*) I think there are many people in this building besides myself. I heard some girls giggling last night. Little girls. There are thuds, screams, long monotonous arguments, radios, televisions, footsteps. . . . This is Peter's building and he can populate it the way he wants. He loves many girls, not just me. I know this. I'm not jealous. I'm not certain of my body (*she touches herself vaguely*) so how can I be jealous? How can I be jealous of what he does to other bodies

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in this building? I wish Peter would come back. I need him. And my father, I know that my father is on his way, yes, he's on his way, and my new husband Martin is on his way, they are all drawing together, coming together in this room, in me, a crowd of men coming together inside me. . . . I wish Peter would get here first! I wish everything would speed up, my life speed up, the beating in my head get faster, faster, so that I could be shown how I exist the way you are all certain that you exist. . . .

SHELLEY *walks slowly to the left of the stage.* PETER V. *appears in the doorway and enters, silently. He is anywhere from twenty-five to forty years old. His clothes are rakish and jaunty, with an air of being stylish, even faddish, but not in a current fashion. He wears a bright green scarf around his neck and light-colored trousers, that are perhaps too tight for him and light-colored shoes. Friendly, sinister. He assumes an immediate rapport with the audience that is superior to* SHELLEY's.

SHELLEY (*at the window*): I wish you could see out this window! There's a street outside that is like a corridor, but it's very crowded. Listen to that traffic! People are walking on the sidewalk in a big crowd, some of them are crossing the street, getting in the way of traffic. . . . There are children on bicycles . . . an old man on a bicycle. . . . People getting on a bus. . . . There is a building across the street just like this building. It's empty, the windows are boarded up. But at some of the windows people are standing. I wonder if they're young girls, little girls . . . ? People are standing at the windows, like me, looking out. I saw someone move right across the way. . . . We put our hands out like this and we push against the window frames. But nothing happens.

PETER: The first day I brought her here she acted like that! She's always posing. Showing off. She's always primping and posing in front of me, the way girls do. Girls are so cute! What a curse, being cute! You can knock them around, knock their teeth out, they can spit out their teeth one by one but still they're posing for you, playing a game, they're cute as cheerleaders. A lot of them have been cheerleaders. Look at her — after forty-five days of this, or maybe it's been sixty days — she's still ready to break into a cheer, to jump up and stretch her young spine and her arms and show her shapely little body, leading the team to victory and all that.

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PETER *speaks buoyantly, as if promoting some goods;* SHELLEY, *however, is motionless, her shoulders slumping, her appearance dazed and exhausted.*

SHELLEY: The first day he brought me here I ran over to the window. I pushed at the frame like this. I wonder what he thought of me! I don't know if I wanted to jump out the window, or if I just wanted to scare him. I wonder how I looked. My hair was long then. I know I was pretty. All girls my age are pretty, more or less. We can't help it. I can remember pushing at the window . . . standing here . . . my long hair . . . people out on the street . . . late Saturday afternoon and lots of people . . . the smells of food from the street . . . I wanted to push the window apart so that people could see me up here. I wanted to cry out to them, "Look, it's me, it's Shelley, I've come to live here with you, I'm going to be one of you! I'm in love!" Peter V. came up behind me and put his arms around me. Oh, he loved me then, he loved me for a week or more . . . he told me it was the longest he'd ever loved anyone. . . .

PETER: A girl of eighteen or twenty, like that girl, is irresistible. Even if you've been out on business for three days, as I have . . . three days straight with only a few hours sleep, collecting fees, paying people off, making telephone calls, in and out of taxis and in and out of buildings — what a life! I know too many people. Too many girls like this one. Still, she's irresistible, isn't she? Look at her healthy gleaming hair, look at her healthy body! The very heartland of America is between her ribs, I promise you. Her legs are pearly and long and lovely. About her there is only the odor of talcum powder and corn flakes — nothing more, I promise you! The Girl Scout insignia is tattooed on her breast. I promise all that, and more.

SHELLEY: I thought I was calling out for people down there to see me so that they would be jealous. After all, Peter had picked me! But now I think I was calling for help. He had the door locked already. I couldn't get out. He locked the door first, then pressed me flat on the floor — not on the mattress, it wasn't in here yet. He kept banging my head against the floor, making love to me. He convinced me that I didn't exist. My body broke up into pieces, in his hands. It's all different pieces.

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PETER (*enthusiastically*): Is she trying to break the window? Trying to jump out? I'm not going to let her, not yet. Look at the spirit she has! What muscles! What a lovely girl, eh? How much is she worth to you? She has held up very well, it must have been her excellent family life back home, the good dental care and the fortified cereal and the fuzzy lined boots; she is from an excellent suburb of Detroit, Michigan. A lot of care went into her making, centuries of care. She's a midwestern beauty. Look, she's preening, she's posing for us out of sheer exuberance! (SHELLEY *stands without moving, staring down into the street*)

SHELLEY (*turning blindly, not seeing Peter*): He broke my body up into pieces. I am like a jigsaw puzzle. It was right here, on the floor . . . this spot here. . . . But there's no mark. There's no blood. People get nailed to the floor and bleed to death and there is no mark to show what they went through, no evidence, no proof of their existence. . . . The world is crowded with invisible people who can't prove that they exist. (*lightly, lyrically*) Anyway, he loved me! He might love me again! Peter, you did love me! (*She runs to Peter and extends her arms, still without quite seeing him. Peter eludes her, like a dancer. He makes a gesture to the audience, grinning, as if exhibiting the girl, a possession of his.*) I got on a bus and got off a bus, and there I was outside, a few yards away from here, on a Saturday afternoon. What a crowd! All those happy people! I could smell food — hotdogs, mustard, pizza — I ran along the sidewalk with my coat flapping open around me, my skirt very short, my legs very pretty in bright blue stockings, like legs seen flashing through water — And you came up behind me, Peter, and put your arms around me —

PETER: I stood on the sidewalk and watched you run up to me. What a lovely little girl! If I closed my eyes slightly you turned into a herd of lovely little girls — a herd, and all so cute! Your hair was very long then, in the style of your suburb, well-brushed and healthy, a golden brown. Your yellow coat flapped open to show your cute little body and your busy little legs, in blue stockings. I was like a lighthouse; I stood in the crowd and you saw me.

SHELLEY: You stepped out of an alley and jabbed my breast with your elbow!

PETER: I watched you collide with a man, one of our neighborhood bums, a blind man, a tourist attraction the rest of us never notice any longer. You ran right into him, you were so confused, and he

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knocked you away with his elbow, protecting himself at once, he yelled out something at you —

SHELLEY: He yelled, "Get away, you perfumy little bitch! I can smell you!"

PETER: So I walked up to you and said, "Can I be of assistance?"

SHELLEY: You took my arm. . . .

PETER: You grabbed my arm.

SHELLEY: My fingers closed about your arm by themselves . . . I clutched at you, I was falling, drowning, I couldn't keep my balance. . . . Why did that old man yell at me? I could hear hatred in his voice. But nobody hates me — not me — everybody likes me. I'm very popular! I couldn't believe it, the hatred in his voice, that ugly old man. . . . I grabbed onto your arm and everything seemed to fall toward you. The sidewalk tilted toward you. Gravity began. (*she poses prettily*) I got off the bus and there you were! You were what I had been promised. I dreamt about you or someone like you. Two times before I had run away from home, but I never found you. . . . Never. Only police matrons, women with coarse tired skin, worn out from late hours, from struggling with girls. . . .

PETER: What was I wearing?

SHELLEY: Something white — with green stripes — a green necktie — a straw hat — sunglasses — white shoes — You were so handsome! Your teeth were so white! Your hair was curly, like woodshavings, stiff and curly and bunched up around your hat! My hand went out to you and my fingers closed about your arm, grasping your arm —

PETER: I saw that you were five foot four inches, that you weighed 115 pounds, that you were eighteen years old, out for a holiday and needing someone to protect you. Your eyes were hazy even then — such pretty blue eyes! — tiny circles radiated out from the iris, looking so blind, so trusting, so much in love. You wanted me to explain to you that you didn't exist, that it wasn't your fault and you were not to blame and nobody would punish you, so I took you home.

SHELLEY (*turning away suddenly*): You kept bumping my head against the floor. It was the first time for me. You didn't listen. I had to come all those miles on the bus to get away from home, to find someone to love, it was the first time for me, but you didn't listen. Oh, everything entered me! It came into me! The pavement outside — the crowds — the traffic — the buildings —

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the windows — the doors — the roofs — Everything entered my body, flooding into me. You were like a lighthouse — the beacon on a lighthouse! That light! That beam of light! My body broke. It flowed out into the city. It came apart into pieces. (*she touches her body, as if in a daze; she looks down at herself*) There is a body here. I know that. And I am thinking, I am speaking, out of a skull that is on top of this body, covered with flesh, a living skull, the bone hidden from sight. I know this. But there is no connection between myself and this body. I could go on talking and my voice could float away, into the clouds . . . I am the size of an angel, the size of a fingernail . . .I could be borne into the sky on a piece of soot, a piece of charred paper flying in the air. . . . (*suddenly frightened*) Peter is coming! I can hear him coming!

SHELLEY *throws herself down on the mattress.* PETER *leaves the doorway and returns again, rapping on the door. He claps his hands. His tone is louder, even more hearty, slightly scolding.*

PETER: What the hell? What? Wake up, little girl! Get up! Don't you know it's five o'clock in the afternoon, it's time for you to be fixing the house, cleaning and polishing and cooking, don't you know your husband will be home in half an hour?

SHELLEY (*pretends to be waking*): My head aches . . . what happened . . .? I don't feel right. . . .

PETER: You were lying in that same position when I left three days ago. Shame on you, how lazy you are! For shame! What will your husband say? Do you want to anger him again? Why isn't supper on the stove?

SHELLEY: I can't make myself sit up . . . my head aches . . . I feel sick. . . .

PETER: Up, up! (*clapping his hands*) For shame! Have you been hoarding those little white pills? Has someone rolled pills under the door to you? Have you made friends with another little girl, are you rapping on the walls in a secret code? You know you're forbidden to communicate with anyone.

SHELLEY: Yes. . . .

PETER: Then wake up, get going! (*pulls her to her feet in a parody of a dance routine — lightly, musically*) First make the bed. Yes, like that. Yes. Tidy up the house. Yes, this is fine. (*looking about at the mess*) This is what he's paying for, after all. Domestic life. But you'd better start supper right away so that he can smell it

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when he climbs the stairs. That's important. He needs to smell supper cooking when he climbs the stairs. He works all day and thinks of this time — smelling supper as he climbs the stairs, dreaming of you, his head filled with you — (*seizing her and walking her back to the cupboard and sink, the "kitchen" area, barking out commands*) Open the cupboard door! Take out that can of soup! Chicken noodle soup, fine! Open it up!

SHELLEY: How do I open it. . . .

PETER: Where is the can opener? You need a can opener.

SHELLEY (*turning the can around helplessly in her hands*): There is no place to get a hole started, no place that is indented . . . my fingernails are breaking on it. . . .

PETER: No, you need a can opener. What did you do with the can opener?

SHELLEY (*looking around feverishly*): The can opener. . . .

PETER: It must be here someplace. Where did you put it? How could you lose it? Your brain must be like a sieve! I wonder what you think about when I'm not with you. Do you think at all? Do you think of opening yourself up with the can opener and escaping me?

SHELLEY: No, I love you. . . .

PETER: What?

SHELLEY: I love you, only you. . . .

PETER (*discovering the can opener on the floor; kicking it over to her*): Here it is! The mysterious goddamn can opener!

SHELLEY *picks it up. Awkwardly, dreamily, she opens the can and pours its contents into a pan. She turns on the hot plate, etc., moving sluggishly.*

PETER: What's that, the faucet dripping? It's more than a drip, it's a constant trickle. No wonder you can't wake up, you're hypnotized by that sound. Good. Water — waves — the ocean. It reminds us of our first home, the ocean. We can sleep better, awash in that sound. It's good for us. It calms our nerves. (*shouting*) Don't stand there staring at me! Get to work! He'll be home in a few minutes, you've got to look good to him — why are you trying to embarrass me?

SHELLEY (*pressing her hands against her chest, as if out of breath, exhausted*): What is his name again . . .? Gordon?

PETER: No.

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SHELLEY: It is Arthur?

PETER: Arthur belongs to the past. An extreme personality, but charming — not that I blame him for what he did to you. He had every right. I don't defend him because I am a man, defending another man; I defend him because his taste turned out to be better than I had suspected. No, Arthur is gone.

SHELLEY: Then it's . . . Brockwood? Brockway? What was his name again . . .?

PETER: Brockway disappeared, the bastard. Forget about him and fix yourself up for your new husband Martin. Martin Raven. Now do you remember?

SHELLEY (*slowly*): I remember him. I think I remember him. You took me to your place, and to the bathroom there . . . you ran hot water in the sink . . . you washed my hair. . . . You were so loving, your hands, the smell of the shampoo . . . did you love me then? (PETER *is looking through a small notebook he has taken out of his pocket; he pays no attention to* SHELLEY) Yes, you loved me. My knees kept buckling and you held me steady with your own knees, your legs, your thighs . . . you loved me . . . you washed my hair, you shampooed it with green shampoo that burst into lovely white bubbles, sliding through your fingers, like blossoms . . . you were whistling under your breath. . . . The soap ran into my eye and I screamed because it stung so. You had to hold me still. I was crazy that day, so strung-out . . . I don't blame you. . . . You had to press my face down in the water to make me stop screaming. . . . And then you rinsed my hair out and dried it in a big white towel. You, yourself, drying my hair! Peter himself! With so much work and so many people hanging on you, needing you . . . you took the time to wash my hair and then you dried it for me and then you put my dress on me and zipped it up the back, and helped me walk . . . and we met this man, this new man . . . what is his name again . . .?

PETER: You aren't as stupid as you pretend! Wake up!

SHELLEY: I can almost remember him. . . . We were sitting in a parked car? Was that it?

PETER (*shaking her*): Martin Raven is his name!

SHELLEY: Martin Raven. Martin. Yes. Martin Raven. Martin Raven. Martin Raven.

PETER: You could do a little more with yourself. Perfume behind

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the ears, a little more bounce to your walk, fluff out your hair — You aren't really old yet, you know. You have years left. Here, let me straighten your eyebrows a little. (*wets his finger, "fixes" her up, etc.*) You look as if you've been sleeping on your face for three days! Let's see. Your skin is still good. A few pimples on the forehead, but we can fix that — cover it up with your bangs. Like this. Cute. How is your breath? Eh, it isn't very fresh! It smells dried, parched, stale, it smells like this room — and what's this, scum on your teeth? A film of scum on your teeth? (*he rubs at her teeth with his forefinger*) Who is going to want to kiss you, when your breath is stale and there's scum on your teeth? You will lose your popularity if you're not careful! (SHELLEY *embraces him;* PETER *is annoyed but tries not to show it*) What's wrong? Are you sniffling? Are you catching a cold?

SHELLEY: I'm sorry.

PETER: You're not wiping your nose on my shirt, are you? Are you sick?

SHELLEY: My mind is not right. I can't wake up. I can't see the corners of the room.

PETER: Are you catching a cold, that's what I asked.

SHELLEY: I don't know.

PETER: A little girl started out like this — sniffling — then her throat got sore. I looked in her mouth and it was all white with red spots. She started coughing, she couldn't breathe, she kept spitting up mucus. That wasn't so cute, all that mucus! Her cuteness came to an end. I said goodbye and started her walking down the sidewalk to where the patrol car is usually parked, and that was the end of that. I don't want that to happen to you. First the sniffling — then the sore throat — then the pneumonia or whatever it was — then they disappear. I don't want that to happen to you.

SHELLEY: No — please —

PETER: Make yourself look pretty. Hurry up. It never used to take you this long. Smile. Come on, smile.

SHELLEY: I need some of those white things —

PETER: First smile.

SHELLEY (*confused*): Smile. How do I smile? How does it go again . . .?

PETER (*putting his hands around her head and shaking it*): Is your brain turning to mucus? Are you dissolving? Wake up!

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SHELLEY: Tell me what to do —

PETER: Smile! Like this! (*with his fingers he forces her mouth into a smile, which she holds, frozen*) That's better.

SHELLEY: Tell me what else to do. I can't remember. Should I move my hands around when I talk? Should I toss my hair? Where is the ceiling? Is it a low ceiling or a high ceiling? I'm sort of afraid of bumping my head. . . . How far down are my feet from my head? I'm afraid I might knock my chin against my knees. Tell me what to do.

PETER: Go to the stove. See how supper is progressing. Fast! (*clapping his hands*) You are in the center of the city and in the center of America. Between your legs is the center of the world. You possess everything. You're as old as Buddha. You're immortal because you're a female. You mustn't let Peter V. down. You mustn't drag him down with you.

SHELLEY (*puppetlike*): If I reach out with my hand I can touch things. I see this hand; I see it reaching out. It's my own hand. I'm sure of that. Here is something that is not my hand. . . . (*picking up a knife, turning it in the air*) It wasn't in my hand a second ago. It's something different from myself. . . . It's dazzling. The light hurts my eyes. It has something to do with the parts of my brain that are always going on and off, winking on and off, like lights. They're lighting up now. It's like sparks, all that activity in my head! (*turning, laughing;* PETER *is looking through his notebook again*) It's like electricity, or bubbles in soda pop. . . . Peter explained to me that he loved me. He said it was fate. He did love me. He told me that I did not exist. He told me not to worry. He told me he would take care of me. He told me I was light as smoke, lovely in his arms, he entered me and the whole world entered me with him, flowing along my veins, making my veins bulge so that I thought they would burst. . . . And is that true, Peter, that I don't exist?

PETER (*absentmindedly*): Absolutely. You do not exist.

SHELLEY: That I have no name?

PETER: I designate the spot you occupy by the word "Shelley." After all, we found that name in your billfold. It seemed a convenient word. You identified yourself in bright blue ink as "Shelley," on the card called "Identification," and on your driver's license there was another name, "Michele." So I could call you one name or the other. I could call you "S" or "M." Also "Shell." Or "Michael,"

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or "Mitch" or "Mitya." Or "X." You would be obliged to answer. Or any one of a cascade of names here, if one opened up for your use. Some of these names are adorable! (*Flips through notebook; addresses audience. As he speaks* SHELLEY *approaches him with the knife raised, as if hypnotized.*) Listen to this — lovely names, lovely American sounds — Debby, Rose Ann, Ruthie, Dora Lee, Suzy, Bitsy, Dolly, Blondie, Annie, Kitsie, Kitty —

SHELLEY: You love them and not me. . . .

PETER: Franny, Barbie, Sylvie, Laurie, Trixie, Shelley, Nancy, Kathy. . . .

SHELLEY (*screaming*): You love them and not me!

SHELLEY *runs at him with the knife.* PETER *backs up, alarmed.*

PETER: Of course I love them! I love all of them and I love you. They are your sisters. You should love them yourself!

SHELLEY: You love them and not me!

PETER: You are only names in my book, why are you upset? You know what your place is among them! You are lovely little girls, you are lovely little names. None of you exist. You are only names in my book, don't worry, you are all loved equally, I will take care of you, you would all have died years ago except for lovers like me —

SHELLEY (*shaking her head*): You love them and not me!

PETER: I love them and I love you. I love all of you. It's all the same girl. What would you do without me? I tunnel inside you, I put you to sleep, I liberate you, I take you gently apart in handfuls, I put you back together again, I take you apart, I put you back together, I take you apart, I put you back together —

SHELLEY: I want to be the only one you love! Only me!

PETER: But there isn't any you. What do you mean?

SHELLEY (*about to rush at him*): I can see you. I know you. I can see my hand. I can see this knife. I am going to kill you, *I* am going to kill you. . . . *I am going* to kill you. . . . I know that I am going to do something after all these weeks, it's myself that will do it, *I* am going to do it. . . .

PETER (*with his arms outspread, smiling*): Yes, but why?

SHELLEY: Why . . .?

PETER: Why are you going to do it?

SHELLEY (*confused*): Why . . .? I don't know. . . .

PETER: It isn't you, but an evil spirit in you. Who is it? Who is poisoning you against me?

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SHELLEY: I don't understand. . . .

PETER: Is it another man? Your father, maybe? You mentioned your father . . . you thought he was following you? Is he following you? Is his spirit inside you right now?

SHELLEY: I don't know . . . I can't remember. . . . Why am I standing here, what am I going to do?

PETER: That dripping faucet is what you should listen to! Listen to it, relax. The cords in your neck are standing out, it's ugly, there are lines beginning in your face, you'll ruin your looks! Love me. Relax. Forget your father. He won't find you. He's evil, forget him. Why should you want to kill me when you love me?

SHELLEY: I was going to do something. . . .

PETER: You know you love me.

SHELLEY: I love you, yes. . . .

PETER: Of course. Now finish supper.

SHELLEY (*turning, baffled*): It must be my father. You're right. His spirit is inside me, poisoning me. I know he's going to find me. He won't give up until he finds me. (*she lets the knife fall to the floor*) The other time I left home he found me in three days. He notified the police everywhere in the state. Everyone knew about me. I couldn't get away. *Runaway,* they called me, they wrote that down. But they were very nice to me. That was years ago, I was only a child then . . . my father came and took me in his arms and we wept together. . . . Last year I left home again but I got sick. My insides ached. I got the flu from something I ate in a restaurant in the bus station . . . I was very sick . . . so I went to the police myself, I turned myself in. My father was only a few hours behind me. He drove down and picked me up. This time I've been away for weeks, I can hardly remember my home, it seems that I've been away for years and that I'm a different person, that everything has changed . . . when I think back (*in an attitude of painful thought*) I can't really remember that home . . . it's like a glacier has come down over it . . . everything is frozen back there, the people frozen, and there is a girl who used to be myself who is frozen there, a child. . . . What if my father finds me here?

PETER: Don't worry, he won't find you.

SHELLEY: He'll find me, he'll make me go back home with him. . . .

PETER: He can't make you do anything. I'll protect you.

SHELLEY: I don't want to be that girl again, I don't want to be

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Shelley. He'll try to take me in his arms and he'll cry over me, he'll make me cry again . . . I want to forget him, I want to forget Shelley. . . . I cut off her hair to spite her and I went without eating to spite her, to make her thin, very thin, to make her dizzy from not eating, to kill her!

PETER: You did right. You got her weight down to ninety-five pounds; you're very chic now, like a model! I prefer girls as thin as possible, so thin I can fit their delicate little wrists between my teeth, I prefer skin transparent like yours, it's the latest style! And your hair is long enough like that. I'll cut it a little with a razor in a few days. There are some men who like girls that are boys, and some men who like boys that are really girls; the market must be accommodated. How else can we make contact with other people except by accommodating them . . . ? We need our bodies for that. We need our bodies for communion with others. The age craves communion! We can't deny our deepest impulses! We want freedom and love and a *creative sensual contact* with one another — how we hate the machine world, the age of technology, the age of lies, the age of identity and perfection! Why did you want to be Shelley, then, why did you want to kill me? Did you want to return to your old self, to that particular body and that particular name, did you want to forget me, did you want to belong again to your father and a woman said to be your mother, why did you want all that again when it never pleased you . . . did it? You hated it!

SHELLEY: Yes, I hated it. . . .

PETER: You hated your father and your mother. Your father especially.

SHELLEY: Yes, I hated them! Him especially . . . because he loved me more than she did. . . . He kept after me with his love, he wanted to own me, he wants to take me back with him. . . . My father is a doctor. He wants to cure everyone. He wants to clean them up, he wants to fix things, he wants to put bandages on everything, sterilize everything, he wanted me always to wash my hands after I went to the bathroom, he was always spying on me! He wouldn't let me alone! He loved me too much! He wouldn't let me be like the water coming out of that faucet, trickling away, emptying itself out. . . .

PETER (*to the audience*): I had no father, myself. I named myself.

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I gave birth to myself. I read a certain novel, I came across the character of Peter Verkhovensky, he leapt back into the vacancy that was myself, and I gave birth to myself at the age of twenty-five! I introduce myself to everyone as Peter V., because they would not understand that I am really Peter Verkhovensky of Dostoevsky's great novel *The Possessed.* Peter came to America; he lost his political fervor; he became an American, a capitalist. He became me. I became him. But no one can understand that, not even this sympathetic young lady here, not even you, really there is no one who can appreciate me, and so I don't explain myself. I had no father. I was born at the age of twenty-five. Therefore I have no Oedipal complex, I have no superego, in fact I have no unconscious at all. I am pure consciousness. I am pure ego.

SHELLEY: My father is coming to get me — I'm afraid —

PETER: He can't bring the police. They need a warrant. You're old enough to live away from home, you're untouchable, you have every right to live here, in this room, for the rest of your life. Remember that!

SHELLEY: If he comes here and calls me by name —

PETER: I'll protect you.

SHELLEY: Listen! I hear someone coming.

PETER: There's nothing.

They listen; there is no sound.

SHELLEY (*panicked*): Yes, he's coming! I can hear his footsteps! He's on the stairs . . . he must have found out about this room . . . he must have had a detective looking for me. . . . There's nowhere I can go that he can't find me. . . .

PETER: I don't hear anyone. . . .

SHELLEY: Listen! He's on the stairs!

PETER: Don't be frightened, what's wrong with you? I said I'd protect you. It might be Martin Raven coming home. . . .

SHELLEY: Footsteps. . . .

PETER (*watching the door*): Remember that you belong to me. Relax. You belong here. With me. None of this is your fault. You belong to me and to no one else, not even yourself. You're in love. You are sometimes high as the ceiling, bouncing around against the ceiling, you are sometimes flat against the floor, your nostrils pressed to a crack in the floor, you are mine, you are not to blame, you're in love. . . .

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There is a knock at the door. PETER *and* SHELLEY *do not respond. The door is opened and Shelley's* FATHER *appears. He is a well-dressed, distraught man in his forties; he carries a small suitcase. He enters and he and* SHELLEY *stare at each other.*

PETER (*amiably*): How do you do? Have we met? Are you looking for someone? Why have you entered our apartment without knocking? Are you a stranger here? This is my building, didn't you see the sign downstairs — *condemned by order of the fire department?* (*he laughs*) Not looking for a place to hide out, are you? What is your business with Mrs. Raven and myself?

FATHER: . . . Mrs. Raven . . .?

SHELLEY *shakes her head, no, as if answering her father against her will.*

FATHER (*quietly*): What's happened to you?

SHELLEY *stares at him and does not reply.* FATHER *is stunned, baffled. He keeps passing his fingers through his hair.*

PETER: If you have any questions, address them to me. Why don't you introduce yourself? My name is Peter V., a friend of the young lady's, a businessman, a kind of Ariel —

FATHER (*to* SHELLEY): My God, you've lost weight. . . . What's happened to you? Are you sick? Your hair has been cut so short. . . .

PETER (*trying to shake hands with him*): I said my name is Peter V., I am a businessman and a friend of the young lady's. You'd better shake hands with me. I'll call the police and have you thrown out. I don't think you're a gentleman, to walk in here like this. . . . I have friends among the police. I have friends everywhere. You'd better explain yourself.

FATHER: You know who I am.

PETER: What do you want with us?

FATHER: I want to take her back with me. . . .

SHELLEY *turns away; she laughs contemptuously.* PETER *joins in her laughter and manages to force* FATHER *to shake hands with him.*

PETER: But what is your claim? Who are you?

FATHER: You know who I am, I'm Shelley's father. . . .

PETER: The girl in this room with us is not necessarily Shelley. She is not necessarily your daughter. Are you making a claim?

FATHER: What did you do to her? She's sick, isn't she?

PETER: I saved her life.

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FATHER: Can she — can she hear us? Can she understand what we're saying?

FATHER: Shelley. . . .

PETER: Shelley, come here! Look at her! She's playful as a kitten, as a puppy! There's something so innocent about her. . . . She's a piece of matter the spirit has left, it's drained out and left her very innocent. Her soul drained out through the cracks of her darling little body, through its various delicate clefts and holes! — isn't that right, Shelley? Come here and stand by me. You can listen to us if you want to. Isn't she beautiful? She pretends to be sicker than she is. They all do. They want to be pitied and cuddled and then they change their minds, they get afraid, they run away, and then they change their minds again and weep because they have no one to hold them, they can't determine the limitations of their bodies unless someone is always with them, embracing them. Oh, they change their minds twenty times a day! They slip in and out of their minds like clothing! All of them want to die in a man's embrace, the life squeezed out of them, a big bear hug, a cosmic bear hug! Look at her. Between her legs the universe opens up — that darkness, that lovely dark machinery! — but she doesn't know it, she's too far gone.

FATHER: What's wrong with her . . .?

PETER: We must talk man to man. Of course you're not her father. You've looked me up to make a deal with me; you want the girl for yourself. Right?

FATHER: Shelley, are you ready to come home with me?

SHELLEY *laughs wildly, waving him away. She "poses," arching her back, moving conquettishly.* PETER *rubs his hands.*

PETER: If I seriously thought you were this girl's father, barging in here to ruin her life, to take her back to that prison, I would call the police and have them beat you up. After all, this building is mine! I bought it for $10,000 on a land contract last May and only three years ago it was worth $110,000 — think of that! Everything is falling — prices, the tax base, the sidewalks, the streets, everything! It's a time when people like myself have only to stoop to pick up prizes; all we have to do is bend over. Our talent thrives in such troubled times! Ah, we are the truest Americans, the truest talents! — Are you listening to me? I don't believe you're this girl's father. Tell us who you are.

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FATHER (*rubbing his eyes, very confused*): What are you talking about . . .? I can't understand you . . . .

PETER: You understand me well enough!

FATHER: I haven't slept for two days. . . . I've been calling home to see if Shelley is back yet, but every time I call it's the same, nothing ever changes. . . . Your mother says you died and you should be forgotten. But I can't forget.

PETER (*cheerfully*): You're telling us lies! You're making all this up!

FATHER: Once I saw a girl on the street, in Toledo, and I ran after her thinking it was you. . . .

PETER: What's in that suitcase?

FATHER: A projector —

PETER: What?

FATHER: A projector — for slides and films —

PETER: Home movies?

FATHER: Let me explain. Please. You are always interrupting me —

PETER: But we're listening, we're fascinated!

FATHER: I put together some things to show her — if I found her — I wanted to explain myself to her —

PETER: Explain what?

FATHER: I want to be logical and objective. I don't want to force her to do anything.

PETER: What have you got, home movies?

FATHER: Some slides made from snapshots. A few things. I put it together before I left home . . . a few things to show her. . . . There is something I must prove to her.

SHELLEY (*violently*): *He* saved my life, not you! Peter saved my life!

FATHER: Shelley. . . .

SHELLEY: He made me into the dark side of the world. Most of the world is water. I bet you didn't know that! You can sink in it forever, that dark water, it's always moving, pulsating, ebbing, flowing, streaming, draining away, flowing back, flooding, rising, crashing. . . . Try to stop it! You can't! He made me into that water, he made me the dark side of the world, he saved my life by kissing me, it was a kiss that lasted for hours, for days. . . . He breathed into my mouth, he breathed himself into me.

FATHER: You're not well. You're —

SHELLEY: I can't hear you. I'm not even listening. I'm not your daughter or anyone's daughter. I don't remember anything. I am

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not convinced that anything ever happened to me. I don't remember. If Peter exists then I exist, but only when he's in the same room with me. He's gone most of the time. I wait for him and when he returns I come alive again. There is nothing that anyone else can say to me. (*a sudden gesture of anger, embarrassment*) Oh, that stupid thing! That movie projector of yours! You were always embarrassing us, taking pictures all the time — birthdays, Christmas, Easter Sunday, graduation! — how I hated that, being herded around and made to smile, to look pretty, you with your camera trying to put us all on film!

FATHER: You wanted me to take pictures of you —

SHELLEY: I did not!

FATHER: And you loved to watch the movies we made — the whole family loved them!

SHELLEY: I was lying to you.

FATHER: What do you mean? You weren't lying. . . . Now your voice is so strange. . . . It's as if someone else were speaking for you.

SHELLEY *waves him away.*

FATHER: Who is this man, Shelley? What did he do to you?

PETER (*courteously*): I have already introduced myself. . . .

SHELLEY (*to her father*): To you I lied, I was a lie myself — my body was rotten with lies. To him I tell the truth. I tell Peter everything.

FATHER: Who is he?

SHELLEY: A man who saved my life!

PETER (*to* FATHER): Why don't you open up your suitcase? I'm anxious to see what you have. Is it an expensive outfit? I'm thinking of getting a movie camera myself, but I'm careful about buying things, I go slowly, I consider a purchase like that quite an investment. I think I'd wait for sales in January.

SHELLEY (*her hands to her face*): I don't want to look at anything he has. Nothing of his. Nothing he has to show me.

FATHER (*opening the suitcase, moving slowly and apologetically*): Shelley, please . . . I put together a few things to show you. . . . You don't have to do anything. I won't force you to do anything.

SHELLEY: I won't look!

PETER (*examining the projector*): This looks like a good piece of equipment. Where did you get it?

SHELLEY: Make him leave! There's nothing of my life I want to look at — it's finished —

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PETER: Photographs show us the flatness of our bodies. They're really two-dimensional, our bodies. They would be one-dimensional if they could be, but unfortunately one-dimensional things are invisible. The soul is one-dimensional, if it exists. That's why I like photographs and the apparatus that makes photographs possible. I'm grateful to you for coming here this afternoon!

FATHER (*abruptly*): Get away from there!

PETER (*cringing, fawning, mocking*): Are you afraid I'll contaminate your machine?

FATHER: I don't want you touching it.

PETER: My fingers are absolutely clean. I'm sterile inside and out. You're a doctor and you think people must be crawling with germs, and only you can save them. But I'm absolutely clean.

FATHER (*confused*): I'm sorry . . . for losing my temper. . . . I haven't slept for a while. . . . And what is that, that noise? I keep hearing a noise. . . .

PETER: Just a faucet. Does it make you nervous?

FATHER: A faucet . . .?

SHELLEY *runs to the sink. She tries to stop the water by sticking her finger up the faucet.*

SHELLEY (*laughing*): Nothing can stop this! We need a plumber up here. It's been dripping for weeks, it's made the sink rusty, there's a rust-colored ring in the sink. . . . In a few more weeks it will wear the sink away and leak out onto the floor.

FATHER: I'm a little nervous, my hands are shaky. . . .

PETER: It's too bad you haven't slept. Would you like to sleep here, on our mattress? We'd be very quiet — we'd tiptoe around and speak only in whispers.

FATHER: No . . . no. . . . I want to . . . I want to show Shelley these things, and then I'll leave if she wants me to. . . .

FATHER *sets up the apparatus, moving clumsily.*

PETER (*goes briskly to the right to turn off the lights, so that the stage is dim but not dark; he returns to center stage, rubbing his hands*): I'll turn off the lights! Excellent! So you want to interfere with our souls, eh? You want to display yourself to us? You know, in antiquity the gods did not interfere with souls; they were content to maim bodies. You might be walking out in ordinary sunlight and a hand would grab your hair and lift you up into the sky — no surprise! You had to expect such things. Or, because two gods loved you, you might be gored to death by an animal with fabulous

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tusks, perhaps an animal invented right at that moment. . . . But you fathers want to be newer gods; you want to interfere with our souls, your children's souls. But you won't succeed. We no longer have any souls.

FATHER (*as the first slide flashes onto the wall. It is a snapshot of a man and a woman, black and white*): Shelley, this is my mother and father. The year is 1922.

SHELLEY (*angrily*): What do I care about your mother and father?

FATHER: Your grandparents. . . .

SHELLEY: I don't have any grandparents! Anyway I've seen that picture before. I don't know those people, I have nothing to do with them! They're dead!

PETER: They're strangely ugly people, aren't they?

SHELLEY: They're dead!

FATHER: My father was about twenty-five when this was taken. He was a very energetic man, a wonderful man . . . he liked to hunt . . . he bought a gas station and worked very hard, but he lost money . . . everything went wrong. . . . He lost everything in the thirties. He lost his will to live.

SHELLEY (*hysterically*): I don't want to hear this! It's all dead, all finished! It's like breathing into me, opening me up the way Peter did. They want to pump love into you. Everyone wants to pump love into everyone else.

FATHER (*as another slide comes on*): My family. My parents, and my two sisters and my brother. . . .

PETER: And yourself. I would recognize you anywhere.

FATHER: This was taken in 1935.

PETER: You were a skinny kid. Look at those eyes! Christ, you're staring at us — everything is in those eyes! (*walks up to the wall, peering at the picture*)

FATHER (*as another slide appears*): Your mother and I. . . .

SHELLEY: I don't want to see this!

FATHER: . . . before we were married. I was twenty-four then. Wasn't your mother pretty? She was such a pretty woman.

PETER: Is she dead now?

FATHER: Of course not. She's waiting for us back home.

PETER: I thought all those people were dead.

FATHER: They're living, they're not dead. . . . (*as another slide appears*) And this — this is Shelley — only a few weeks old —

There is silence.

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FATHER (*to* SHELLEY): What are you thinking?

SHELLEY *turns away.*

FATHER: Are you — are you well enough to understand what I'm showing you?

PETER: She's afraid of crowds. You brought a crowd into the room.

FATHER: I don't understand you.

PETER: She came running out of a crowd and into my arms, this girl you claim as your daughter. It's the same protoplasm as the infant up on the wall, I suppose, but you can't prove it. Really, you can't prove anything. The crowd opened up and a girl ran toward me, I could see she was terrified, she needed love, she needed me to mythologize her. So I took her in my arms. I saved her from the crowd. You're bringing the crowd back, you're confusing her.

FATHER: Shelley? Come here.

SHELLEY *approaches him as if against her will. Her hands are pressed against her face.*

SHELLEY: I can't see anything.

FATHER: More pictures of Shelley . . . eight months old . . . a year old . . . eighteen months . . . two years . . . three years . . . this was taken on Christmas Day 1957. . . .

SHELLEY: Stop it!

FATHER: Your sister Jeanne. . . .

SHELLEY: I don't have any sister!

FATHER: Easter Sunday 1960. How can 1960 be so long ago?

PETER: The sister is quite pretty!

FATHER: Shelley in high school, fourteen years old. . . .

SHELLEY: It isn't me! Go to hell!

FATHER: Another picture of Shelley. Her mother took it; that's me in the background. Do you recognize this, Shelley? Cape Cod. Do you recognize that bathing suit, Shelley?

SHELLEY: My head is being blown up like a balloon. You're killing me. If my head gets much bigger I'll float up against the ceiling . . . you'll have to pull me down by grabbing hold of my ankles. . . .

FATHER: This was taken the same day. Look at her beautiful long hair!

PETER: Did you love her?

FATHER: Why — why do you speak in the past tense?

PETER: Do you love her?

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FATHER: Yes, I love her. I only followed her here to talk with her, quietly. To show her these things. I don't want to force her into anything, I want to prove something to her, I won't make demands upon her . . . I want to prove something to her. . . .

SHELLEY: He wants to prove that I exist!

PETER (*motioning her away*): Calm down, please. There's an odor released from you when you're excited. It isn't very cute. Men don't smell like that.

SHELLEY: I'm not a man but I'm not a girl either. I'm not male and I'm not female. Look at that ugly body in the picture! That body! Breasts and hips and legs and long hair and that smile, that stupid smile! I could hack that girl into pieces with a knfe! I could tear her into pieces with my teeth!

FATHER: This one was taken in the fall . . . the light was a little dim . . .

PETER: The three women in your family, eh? Your wife and your two daughters. . . . Why did you take all these pictures?

FATHER: Because. . . .

PETER: Why do Americans take so many pictures?

FATHER: Because. . . . because . . . .

SHELLEY: They want to prove that they exist!

PETER: Don't stand so near me. You smell like that mattress, you smell like blood. . . . Women stink; they smell so much of blood that dogs are drawn to them.

SHELLEY: I don't smell of blood!

PETER: Your underwear was stained when I first met you.

FATHER (*as if not hearing*): And this is your mother on her birthday last year. Remember those flowers? Your mother was saying, just as I took this picture, "It won't turn out, it's too dark in here. . . ."

SHELLEY: He's bringing everyone in this room!

FATHER: Another of Shelley. Look at that smile! She knows she's much prettier than her sister . . . she seems to offer her face up to the camera like a flower, a lovely flower. . . .

SHELLEY: They are all coming in this room, all of them . . .

SHELLEY *rushes at her father and tries to knock the projector over. Her* FATHER *takes hold of her and they struggle.*

SHELLEY: He's touching me! I can feel him touching me!

In the struggle the apparatus is knocked over. PETER *tries to pull* SHELLEY *away.*

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SHELLEY: It doesn't prove anything —

FATHER: Shelley, what's wrong with you? Stop —

SHELLEY (*screaming*): There's nothing there! Pictures! I didn't see them — they're not real — You failed! You failed to convince me!

PETER *turns the lights on, hurrying. Then he crosses to* SHELLEY *and tries to calm her.*

PETER: You're hysterical. Be quiet.

FATHER: I'm taking you home with me —

SHELLEY (*screaming*): You failed! Failed!

PETER (*righting the projector, gathering the slides together*): It was an interesting interlude, but now we must return to real life. All this emotion is embarrassing. The girl's husband will be home at any minute. She has certain duties she must perform for him. Everything in the past is buried, nobody cares about the past, shovelfuls of time have buried it. Leave us. Go away.

FATHER: No, she's coming back with me —

PETER: What do you want with a girl like that? She's too far gone. She's not much good, believe me.

FATHER (*shoving* PETER): I'll kill you —

PETER *jumps to his feet and pushes Shelley's* FATHER *away.*

PETER (*scornfully*): An old god! Old mythology! Go to hell!

FATHER: I'll call the police —

PETER: I'll have the police kick your teeth out, you old bastard!

FATHER: I — I'll —

SHELLEY (*her hands to her face*): Make him leave!

PETER: Now you must leave, really. Everything is over. The lights are on and it's embarrassing now.

FATHER: But I had more pictures yet. . . . And I didn't explain the ones I showed, I had more to say, much more . . . everything went so quickly, it was so confused. . . . I had more to say. I should have written it down. . . .

SHELLEY: Make him leave!

PETER: This is my building and you must leave. I don't like to speak harshly to a man your age, but. . . .

The door opens suddenly and "Martin Raven" enters. He is a heavyset man of ordinary appearance, rather pale. He is startled at seeing the father.

PETER (*cheerfully*): Hello, Martin!

MARTIN: What's all this?

PETER: He's just leaving.

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MARTIN: He looks like trouble. He looks like a detective. . . .

PETER: No, that isn't it. He's a friend of the girl's but he's leaving.

FATHER: Who is this?

PETER: Her young husband has just come home; their domestic life must begin; there is no room for you. Private life is sacred.

FATHER: Shelley —

SHELLEY: Don't make me look at you!

FATHER *hesitates, then puts his things together slowly and prepares to leave.* SHELLEY *stands with her back to him, her hands pressed against her face.*

PETER (*to* FATHER): You don't exist to her. You're just a beak and claw fluttering around her head; she's always dreaming about that kind of thing; she dreams of crowds. Up here, we take care of her. We love her.

FATHER: But I can't leave her here. . . .

MARTIN: Who the hell is this guy?

PETER (*briskly*): Sit down and relax! You've had a hard day at the Post Office, right? You want some supper, right? You want some loving, right? This gentleman is on his way out.

FATHER: But if I leave. . . .

MARTIN (*both frightened and aggressive*): Look, you, get the hell out of here! I don't like the looks of things!

FATHER: Shelley . . .?

SHELLEY: I don't hear anything! I will never say anything again!

Silence.

FATHER *picks up the suitcase and leaves.*

MARTIN: What the hell was that all about? I thought nobody knew about her up here. What if the cops come? Who's been talking?

PETER: Relax, take off your shoes. Take off your coat. Did you smell supper as you came up the stairs?

MARTIN: The hell with supper. I'm not eating here.

MARTIN *crosses to* SHELLEY *and takes hold of her by the back of the neck and shakes her.*

MARTIN: You! I don't trust you — you're sweating like a pig! You smell like a pig!

SHELLEY *is passive in his hands; she submits to being shaken, mauled.*

PETER: I guarantee you that she has not been unfaithful. I was here all along.

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MARTIN: I can't stay all night tonight. My mother is suspicious. She asks why I'm staying out so late — she worries about me. I'm only thirty-two. She worries about my health. What if I caught a disease from this little maniac, how could I tell my mother? I'd be so ashamed!

PETER (*at the sink; begins to wash his face*): She's absolutely clean, I swear it.

MARTIN: Are you clean, eh? What are you? Are you a little boy, eh? What are you underneath this stuff?

MARTIN *pulls at her clothing. He pushes her down onto the mattress and struggles with her.* PETER *takes shaving things out of the cupboard.*

PETER: I was in the neighborhood so I stopped in to see her and to shave. I didn't mean to stay so long. I have a busy evening ahead and I want to look my best. . . .

MARTIN *struggles with* SHELLEY, *who cries out. He puts his hand over her mouth.* PETER *stands at the sink shaving. The light fades about him, until only he is illuminated and the rest of the set is in darkness.*

PETER: I prize my existence, personally. I am a young man standing at a sink in a condemned building, in a condemned city, and yet I take pride enough in my own existence to shave. My face is very real. My face is said to be handsome. But what if all this smiling wears it out, the way water wears out porcelain? Will we all die, then? Will we all come to an end? Will our existences be questioned so cruelly?

CURTAIN

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AMERICA II

EDITORS' NOTE: *The three different versions of American history in the comments by Michael Harrington, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Howard Zinn on William Appleman Williams's reading of our past*[1] *continue* PR*'s series on what's happening to America. Readers' comments are welcomed.*

Michael Harrington

America has long been burdened by an overly easy conscience.

This is the nation of "pacifist imperialism" (the phrase is Trotsky's). It came upon the world market as a great power when the colonies had already been divided among the Europeans. So with an exception or two, it did not occupy and administer other countries as England, France and Germany did. Instead, its imperial aims were served by a seeming antiimperialism: the Open Door, free access for all to Asia, i.e., the right of the economically strongest nation to dominate.

It is in this context that one can understand the "democratism," the ideology of independence, with which Franklin D. Roosevelt so angered Charles de Gaulle. It even helps explain that extraordinary — and brief — moment at the end of World War II in Indochina when American agents conspired with Ho Chi Minh against the French.

As a result of this history, Americans feel guiltless about foreign

1 *The Roots of the Modern American Empire.* By William Appleman Williams. Random House. $15.00

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oppression, and the hatred of Yankee imperialism to be found in Latin America strikes the man in the street as inexplicable and ungrateful. We have only occasionally taken over the Latin American republics by force of arms and it is widely thought that we are pouring billions of trade and aid into the area. So last summer when the Chilean foreign minister told the president, on behalf of all the countries of South America, that the United States was actually taking more money out of the hemisphere than it was putting in, *Le Monde* reported that Nixon did not even seem to hear what was being said to him.

William Appleman Williams has labored long and hard to deprive us of this excessive innocence. He has written from the Left but his attitudes are provocative, innovating, unpredictable and he does much more than simply rehearse, or apply, Lenin and the other Marxists. He is, to take one of his most striking interpretations, convinced that Herbert Hoover must be rehabilitated from a radical point of view (and in the process saved from liberal slanders). And in this new book, as in his other studies, he argues that the entire American people have been willing participants in, and enthusiasts of, our imperialist economics even though they were also convinced anticolonialists.

Unfortunately, I must report that in *The Roots of Modern American Empire* Williams rests his entire case on one of his most questionable analyses: that the expansionism of market oriented farmers is *the* key to the American past and present. That, I think, is not the case and it makes this new book less valuable than some of his past contributions (particularly *The Contours of American History*) which were much more sensitive to the dialectical complexity of our experience than this monochromatic version of it. In saying this, I do not fault his scholarship — I am not competent to do that and, in any case, I am quite impressed by his marshaling of the facts. It is his interpretation that I find wanting.

First, let Williams speak for himself.

The italicized central theme of *Roots* is: "the expansionist outlook that was entertained and acted upon by metropolitan leaders during and after the eighteen nineties was actually a crystallization in industrial form of an outlook that had been developed in agricultural terms by the agrarian majority of the country between 1860 and 1893." For the American farmer "had always seen himself as a creature of the market place whose wealth and welfare depended upon the profitable sale of his surplus product." Thus a consensus was created: "The metropolitan minority of the nation gradually accepted the expansionist aspects of the agricultural concept of the world."

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In *The Great Evasion,* Williams had made the triumph of this expansionist attitude the central problem, from a left-wing point of view, of American history. For when the workers adopted the frontier thesis, he argued, they evaded the challenge of building the good society. Instead of facing up to capitalist reality they took refuge in the free soil panacea and later accepted the imperialist consequences of that view. In *The Contours of American History,* Williams asserted that American leaders after World War II "fearing another depression (or a backslide into the one in the 1930s) . . . turned once again to overseas expansion of the frontier." Indeed, the anticommunist policy of containment "was, no doubt unconsciously, the product of analyzing the Soviet Union from the assumption of the frontier-expansionist theory of history. Denied the chance to expand, ran the doctrine, the Soviet System would break down."

All this adds up to a most iconoclastic reading of the American past. In a way, Williams uses the Turner thesis in order to criticize the traditional deductions which were drawn from it. For a Turnerian like Woodrow Wilson, the key term in the theory about the expansion of frontier was "frontier." Its disappearance, he held, required new innovations (for that matter, the Debsian socialists, who studied Turner at their midwestern "encampments," believed that the end of the frontier was the herald of socialism itself). But for Williams the crucial word is "expansion" and what happened was that America, under Wilson and other liberals, preferred war and overseas adventure to the task of building a genuine commonwealth at home.

I think Williams is quite right to emphasize how profoundly, and unconsciously, imperialist the American attitude has been. But his specific case that agrarianism was the basis of this development does not hold up — and it leads him to a one-sided description of the Populists and other farm radicals.

There is an irony in all this. Some years ago Richard Hofstadter published his account of the two sides of Populism: the "soft" side which was radical, ideological and anticommercial; the "hard" side which was business oriented. As the hard side prevailed over the soft, Hofstadter said, there was a transition in farm politics "from pathos to parity." The agrarians, he concluded, shifted from great schemes to control the volume of money to the very practical interest-politics of controlling the volume of farm products. To many progressive historians this was a libel of the Populists, the result of essentially conservative scholarship. But now Williams comes along and, from the Left, is even more systematic in debunking the Populists than Hofstadter had ever been. Farmers, of all people, are now made responsible for imperialism.

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I think Hofstadter and his progressive critics were closer to the truth than Williams. It may well be that the Populist rhetoric served purposes other than those defined by the words themselves. But one cannot argue that the farmer "had always seen himself" as a creature of the marketplace when, in his soft persona, he is so consistently and vocally hostile to commercialism. For that matter in his *Agrarian Socialism* Seymour Martin Lipset used the capitalist character of American (and prairie Canadian) agriculture to explain leftism in the fields. There were, Lipset said, three variants of Populism: southern, where the race issue subverted the class movement of the poor; western mining areas where silver became an ideology; and the single-crop wheat areas.

The people in this last category produced for a highly unstable world market. Their lives were therefore extremely insecure and their political responses were more volatile, and radical, than, say, the dairy farmers. These were the conditions which led to Populism and they also provided the basis for the extraordinary strength of Debsian socialism in the Midwest. To reduce this complex phenomenon to one of its components, market orientation, is a great oversimplification. The reality, I suspect, was much more dialectic and contradictory than the analysis of it in *The Roots of Modern American Empire,* and Hofstadter (or his critic, C. Vann Woordward) and Lipset are better guides to it than Williams.

Secondly, one has to deal with the fact that the decisive trend in the last third of the nineteenth century was urban and industrial, not agricultural. On this count, the frontier thesis about that period lacks a solid factual basis: for every industrial worker who became a farmer and was thus able to evade the class struggle in the city, twenty farmers became urban dwellers. This, to be sure, does not refute Williams's theory since he is concerned about people's consciousness of reality, not about the reality itself. And it is true that American workers *thought* that the frontier was an escape and therefore campaigned vigorously for free land. So Williams can argue that expansionism was a special, if subjective, element in the uniquely American experience. But he cannot hold that it was the decisive political and economic force in an age when the United States was becoming the paramount industrial power of the world.

Earlier agrarian expansionism was one of the crucial economic interests affecting American policy. The Beards discerned an "agricultural imperialism" under Jefferson and rightly emphasized the specifically capitalist character of farming in this country. On this score, Williams himself has provided some very illuminating analyses of the Revolutionary

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War in terms of a dispute over markets between the colonists and the English. But by the eighteen nineties the money and power of the industrialists was much more important, much more fundamental, than that of the farmers.

It is, of course, quite true that those capitalists would use any elements of the American ideology, including the agrarian, that would serve their own purposes. But that does mean that expansionism was "a crystallization in industrial form of an outlook that had been developed in agricultural terms." The test as to which class determines the basic outline of policy and which one has its rhetoric co-opted is easy enough: which class is dominant. If a sophisticated representative of the corporations like Mark Hanna (and Williams is extremely helpful in understanding him) was willing to consider nationalizing the railroads, that hardly made him a Populist or a socialist. It simply shows that shrewd ruling classes are always willing to use the language, and even parts of the program, of their opponents so long as they bolster the *status quo*.

It is also not crucial that during this period the farmers were the majority and the urban centers the minority. As I get Williams's implication in stressing this point, that is one more reason for making the agricultural expansionists cause and the metropolitan expansionists effect. But the ruling class was hardly chosen on the basis of a head count. It was, of course, a tiny minority (as all ruling classes, except the as yet unseen socialist nonclass, are). But it commanded the decisive means of production in the society — which were industrial.

Yet even though the agrarians did not dominate the capitalists of the cities they did have a fateful influence upon American working-class history. For in the period when the European proletariat was organizing itself into the mass socialist parties of the Second International, its counterparts in the United States were forever being sidetracked by the panaceas which came from the fields. More often than not in the period before 1900, laborism was co-opted by the inflationist schemes of the farmers. But even though the agrarians were, alas, successful in this case in having a profound influence upon another class, that still did not make them the basic, creative force in American life, as Williams argues.

In this assessment of Williams's version of turn-of-the-century imperialism, I am obviously much closer to the traditional Marxist analysis than he is. But when I turn to the application of his thesis to more recent times, I must fault him for being too much of an orthodox leftist. And this is quite relevant to radical politics in America today given the almost fetishistic status of the word imperialism.

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When the New Left emerged in the sixties it was hostile to what it regarded as Marxist sectarianism. So euphemisms were used: one was against the "system," not capitalism or imperialism; the enemy was the "establishment," not the ruling class; and so on. In the late sixties as the horror of Vietnam provoked angrier protest, many returned to the old vocabulary and it became a show of political manhood to declare oneself "antiimperialist." Unfortunately, in the process these young people vindicated their early fears, for they adopted a sectarian, somewhat outlived explanation of foreign policy. And the uses to which Williams has put his thesis may, I fear, encourage this militant imprecision.

In *The Contours of American History,* as I noted before, Williams describes the Cold War and the containment policy as products of the expansionist psychology. Specifically, the struggle with Russia was triggered by fear of depression, and containment was predicted on the neo–Turner notion that a nation which could not expand had to break down.

Before proceeding to my main point, an important political aside. I am disturbed that Williams, and all the other revisionist historians of the Cold War, tend to see America as the actor and Russia as the (innocent) reactor. It is of some moment, I believe, that the Soviet dictator in that period was, according to the persuasive testimony of N. S. Khrushchev, in the throes of galloping paranoia or that Zhdanov imposed a narrow party line on all of Russian life and culture. Moreover, given the obvious role of Soviet military power in establishing most of the East European regimes, some of the American hostility to the move came precisely from that anticolonialist "good side" of the national character, i.e., the same attitude which made us briefly anti-French in Indochina.

But more basically, I do not think that the traditional Leninist analysis — that capitalism exports capital to colonial lands in order to stave off domestic crisis and counter the falling rate of profit at home — holds. And Williams, with his explanation of the Cold War as an antidepression maneuver, is still arguing that position. For, as I pointed out in *Toward a Democratic Left* at some length, Lenin specifically assumed that it was impossible for capitalism to build a welfare state. But the period after World War II has, of course, refuted that assumption in every one of the advanced lands. Capitalism has become neocapitalism, i.e., planned, statified, welfarist. That has left enormous unresolved problems but it has also repealed Lenin's law of imperialist motion.

This is hardly to say that capitalism has become philanthropic or orients toward genuine economic development in the Third World. It does mean that the economic exploitation of the ex-colonies has, with the large but not decisive exception of the empire of oil, been less and less important with each year since World War II. And the great thrust

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of the corporations has not been so much toward Asia, Africa and Latin America, which are poor, unstable, etc., but toward American investment in Europe and European investment in America. Lenin must be at least footnoted by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber.

In short, America did not *need* a cold war as the only way of avoiding a depression. There were many other reasons why it got involved in one — the reflexes of a conservative power in a revolutionary world, democratism, the absence of a democratic Left capable of offering a positive foreign policy and so on — but I do not believe that the evidence supports the old-fashioned Leninist notion. But in a sense that Leninism is really not central to Williams's case. He is quite right that there is a profound expansionist tradition in this country even if I think him wrong in his account of its origins. And just as the capitalists could adopt some of the rhetoric of the Populists at the turn of the century, so in the nineteen forties cold-war apologists could adapt the expansionist emotions to a new situation. However, there is just no point to dragging a fear of a depression into the analysis.

Finally, there is a very political point to this disagreement of mine with Williams and I might as well put it out in the open where it can be discussed rationally. The tough-minded theory that America is basically and utterly imperialist has the most reformist, even quietist, consequences. For if a socialist revolution is necessary before this nation can do any good at all, and if, as is rather obvious, that revolution is not too imminent, then the assumption of a rigid American imperialism proves that the Left in this country can't do anything significant. Indeed, it was precisely this line of reasoning which led some of the ultraleftists to terrorism. They turned, not simply on capitalism and its elite, but against the entire white working class as well, i.e., against the overwhelming majority of the people. Given that analysis, they had a sort of mad, tragic logic in deciding to be fifth column guerrillas of the Third World within the United States.

And what bothers me about the Williams emphasis is that it tends to play down the possibilities of fighting to change American policy from within. For it describes only what is expansionist and crass in the past and omits what was genuinely anticommercial and democratic. As a result, the present configuration of American power is made to seem much more historically inevitable than it really is. And this is a strange consequence of Williams's analysis since he himself is obviously very much committed to transforming the nation. But I think his one-sided and overly pessimistic reading of *The Roots of American Empire* unwittingly subverts his own political perspective.

I have been emphasizing my disagreements with Williams but let

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me once again acknowledge his excellent intentions, the very real value of much of his scholarship and the intellectual courage which takes him down so many unexplored paths into the American past. My complaint is that, for once, reality is not as antisocial and vicious as it might seem. I hope, in particular, that the young radicals will learn of how deeply imbued with expansionism this nation was and is, but that they will also realize that in our past and present there are resources — more than Williams acknowledges — to fight to change that heritage.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Professor William Appleman Williams is, among historians, the most influential exponent of an economic interpretation of American expansionism. He is one of the few contemporary American historians who can be said to have founded a school; and both his own trenchant writings and the multiplying books of his disciples have had marked impact on the way younger historians think about American foreign policy.

In earlier works, Professor Williams placed the motives of expansionism in an industrial context. The American quest for empire, he argued, had arisen out of the need to provide markets for the surplus generated by industrial capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century; the policy declared in the Open Door notes was based on the belief that capitalism could continue to work only if the market for manufactures continued to expand. In *The Roots of the Modern American Empire,* Professor Williams now adds his later view that the expansionist outlook adopted by businessmen in the eighteen nineties had actually been formulated a good while before by agricultural interests, acting on the conviction that their own prosperity required foreign markets.

Cotton, of course, had long depended on exports; and during and after the Civil War, American commercial agriculture as a whole started to become habituated to overseas sales. The depression of the early eighteen seventies intensified the need for foreign markets. Then the export boom of the late seventies confirmed the agrarian faith in overseas expansion. It was this agrarian pressure, Professor Williams contends, that

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led to the redefinition of the American marketplace as the world marketplace and to the consequent reconstruction of American foreign and naval policy. Finally, in the nineties, the closing of the frontier and the onset of a new depression not only remobilized the farmers but alerted and alarmed the urban businessmen, who in any case were now facing surplus problems of their own. The result was a national consensus in support of the expansion of the marketplace, by peaceful means if possible, by war if necessary. In this process, nations that challenged America's market aspirations came to be perceived as threats to American freedom. This expansionist compulsion, so deeply rooted in the American economy, committed all American administrations in the twentieth century, whatever their tactical disagreements, to "the extension of American economic and political power throughout the world." Hence the war with Spain; hence the First and Second World Wars; hence the war in Vietnam.

The Roots of the Modern American Empire is, I think, really two books. The first is an intensive monographic account of the rise of the overseas-markets thesis in the American agricultural economy in the nineteenth century. There is nothing new, of course, in the emphasis on the importance of foreign trade in American economic development; but Professor Williams's prodigious and exhausting research in official records, in personal manuscript collections, in the proceedings of farmers' associations and in agricultural journals makes evident as never before the extent to which the search for overseas markets was a conscious and explicit theme in American economic thought. By isolating that theme and stating it with clarity and power, Professor Williams places a number of episodes and men in nineteenth-century American history in interesting new perspective: the monetary and tariff debates, for example; the attitudes toward foreign investment in the United States; the impact of Populism on foreign policy; the role of politicians like Blaine and McKinley; the implications of Turner's frontier thesis; the confusion of a belief in free markets with a belief in freedom.

This book has also, it must be confessed, some of the traditional defects of the monograph. The writing is stiff, hammering and tedious; and the periodic attempts to inject liveliness are singularly unfortunate. Thus Professor Williams is not satisfied, when he quotes a source, to write that his characters "said" something; they "snorted" it or "enthused" or "shot back." In the ten pages from 297 to 307, for example, Milton George "whooped" one sentence, William Ralls Morrison "vowed" another, Ulysses S. Grant "roared" a third, T. B. Catron "thundered" his, Grover Cleveland "intoned" his and several others "cried" theirs. He should consult Fowler on elegant variation.

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Still, if Professor Williams had been content to trace out the agrarian origins of the oveseas-markets thesis and to demonstrate its later acceptance by the business community, one would only be grateful for a valuable if perhaps excessively laborious clarification of a significant strand in American expansionist thought. Alas, he is after bigger game. As the title of his work suggests, he thinks he has uncovered "*the* roots" of American empire, and this argument constitutes his second book. In this book he contends both that the determination to enlarge the marketplace explains everything aggressive in American foreign policy and that American foreign policy will ineluctably continue on an imperialist course abroad until it abandons the free market at home, transforms its economic institutions and establishes a socialist (for him, a decentralized and communal) society.

When Professor Williams insists that imperialism is totally reducible to economic motives, he is writing, of course, in a well-defined tradition. Half a dozen years ago in his book *The Great Evasion,* he said "Of all the evasions in which Americans have indulged themselves the most serious one is very probably their persistent flight from any intellectual and moral confrontation with Karl Marx." It is true that Marx talked about capitalism's need for "the conquest of new markets," but so, as Professor Williams readily concedes, did Adam Smith; and *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* shows few signs of any confrontation, whether intellectual or moral, with Marx. My impression is that Professor Williams is really not much of a Marxist, except in an *épater–l'academie* sense. He is rather a native American radical, somewhat in the school, though without the grandeur, of the earlier Charles A. Beard.

Actually Marx himself had a more benign view of imperialism than latter-day Marxists, or than Professor Williams. As Shlomi Avineri's useful compilation of Marx's comments on empire (*Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* [Anchor Books]) makes clear, while Marx condemned the atrocities which accompanied European colonialism, his conception of the stages of economic development required him to believe that underdeveloped countries had to go through a capitalist phase before they would be eligible for communism. In this light, he was compelled to regard western colonialism as a progressive force in spite of itself. Thus he could write of the British in India: "The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution." Engels put it more succinctly when the French occupied Algeria: "The conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilisation."

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It was Lenin who promulgated the "Marxist" theory of imperialism, and he drew his inspiration on this subject not from Marx but from the British Radical J. A. Hobson. (Indeed, there is a curious passage in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* when Lenin scathingly attacks the view, which he attributes to Cunow, that imperialism is progressive.) Lenin explained imperialism primarily in terms of capitalism's need to find investment outlets for its surplus capital; but this theory did not work especially well for the United States, which was still a capital-importing nation in its moment of colonialist frenzy. Accordingly the economic interpretation of American expansion has generally, as with Professor Williams and with Professor Walter LaFeber in *The New Empire,* concentrated on the search for markets. (A notable exception is Professor Gabriel Kolko who oddly fastens on the search for raw materials as the mainspring of American imperialism in his little tract *The Roots of American Foreign Policy.*) In *The Roots of the Modern American Empire,* however, Professor Williams is innocent of any interest in the Leninist view, or indeed in any theoretical view, of the nature of imperialism.

But, if Professor Williams is not possessed by general theories of imperialism, he is possessed by an impassioned vision of the all-powerful role of markets in the American drive for empire. This vision leads him, I am sure unconsciously, to distort his evidence to suit his thesis. Let us take one example. He has made a great deal here and elsewhere of the fact that Madison wrote in the Tenth Federalist, "Extend the sphere," and in the Fourteenth Federalist of "one great, respectable and flourishing empire." From such statements he deduces that Madison "clearly understood that foreign markets were part of the sphere that had to be enlarged to insure the continuation of republican institutions and of prosperity." Professor R. W. Van Alstyne advanced a similar argument in *The Rising American Empire* when he triumphantly cited the fact that Washington referred to the United States as a "rising Empire" in a letter of March 1783 as proving that the United States was "by its very essence an expanding imperial power."

This may or may not have been so; but the evidence adduced by Professors Williams and Van Alstyne proves nothing of the sort. Their case turns on the meaning of the word "empire" in the seventeen eighties. If one consults a contemporaneous dictionary — say the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* published in 1771 — one finds "empire" defined as "a large extent of land, under the jurisdiction or government of an emperor." "Emperor" is defined as "a title of honour among the ancient Romans . . . now made to signify a sovereign prince, or supreme ruler

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of an empire." The first European example adduced is Charlemagne, of whom the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, "It is to be observed that there was not a foot of land or territory annexed to the emperor's title."

Or, if one consults the standard modern work on the subject, Richard Koebner's *Empire,* one finds that the essence of the Latin word *imperium* was the idea of command, rule, sovereignty, the exercise of authority, and that in the eighteenth century the word "empire" by no means necessarily implied territorial expansion. Indeed, the British historian, E. A. Freeman, writing in 1885, could say, "It is only in quite later times within my own memory, that the word 'empire' has come into common use as a set term for something beyond the kingdom." In any case, an examination of the context in which Washington used the phrase makes it clear that by "rising Empire" he meant no more than a new nation securing its national sovereignty. As for Madison's supposedly damning words, A. K. Weinberg is indisputably correct in that excellent but neglected book *Manifest Destiny* when he writes that the authors of the *Federalist* "had reference not to expansion but only to the amalgamation of the thirteen States."

This example may suggest the anxiety with which Professor Williams seeks to press recalcitrant evidence into the service of his thesis. Again and again, he overstates and manipulates his case in order to insert overseas-market preoccupations where they existed only feebly or not at all. Thus he writes that Grant in his annual message of 5 December 1870, "first reiterated his argument that Santo Domingo should be annexed because of its value as a market for farm surpluses." But, if one turns to the Grant message, one sees that the first argument advanced for the annexation of "San Domingo" was that, if the United States did not act, Europeans would. Grant mentions both the strategic argument and the raw materials argument before he gets to the market argument, and even here his concern is as much with industrial as with agricultural products. Similarly Professor Williams tries to force the Populist platform of 1892 into the overseas-markets straitjacket; in point of fact, the Populist platform never mentioned overseas markets — rather strangely in view of Professor Williams's contention that farmers had thought of nothing else for a generation. Cleveland's message of 17 December 1895 on the Venezuela controversy was, in Professor Williams's judgment, "a well-nigh definitive application of the marketplace conception of the world"; actually the message said nothing at all about markets — how in the world would the Venezuela border dispute affect either American or British access to Latin American markets? — and

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rested on the determination to keep British *political* and military influence, not British exports or investment, out of the hemisphere.[1]

The fervency of his vision leads Professor Williams not only to exaggerate his points but to fill his text with implicit moral overtones and undertones. To put it briefly, he seems to regard the quest for overseas markets—i.e., foreign trade—as a wicked thing *per se*. Every time he can find anyone in the nineteenth century expressing an interest in exports he quotes the statement against him as if it were an inadvertent confession of a desire to murder his mother. This viewpoint raises interesting questions, with none of which Professor Williams chooses to deal.

For one thing, what is so evil about the desire to sell or exchange domestic products in other countries? For that matter, what is so evil about the Open Door—that is, the preference that foreign trading should take place on an equal basis among nations? If Professor Williams thinks that low tariffs, multilateral trading relations and so on are wicked, what sort of trading pattern does he advocate? Bilateral relations? Managed trade? Autarky? How indeed does he suppose that American economic development would have taken place without foreign trade? As Douglass C. North points out in *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860:* "There are few exceptions to the essential initiating role of a successful export sector in the early stages of accelerated growth of market economies."

His moralistic approach to the problem of foreign trade, in addition, makes him miss out on the historical context of the American tradition in overseas commerce. In this connection, it is well to consider another book on American expansionism, also published in 1969—*America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* by James A. Field, Jr. This book, which has been widely neglected by the lay press, is a far better, if far less pretentious, piece of history than the Williams book; it is also infinitely better written and in unusually literate and sardonic prose.

Professor Field makes it clear that the American interest in foreign trade long predated a general agricultural surplus and was quite separate from it. Indeed, the forty-five years after the Treaty of Ghent—in short,

1 Theodore Roosevelt thus stated the issue: "If Great Britain can extend her territory in South America without remonstrance from us, every other European power can do the same and in a short time you will see South America parcelled out as Africa has been. We should then find ourselves with great powers to the South of us and we should be forced to become at once a nation with a powerful army and navy with difficulties and dangers surrounding us."

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the two generations *before* this rise of the general surplus — were the great age of American shipping. And, as Professor Field lucidly shows, the founders of the republic saw commerce not only as an immediate necessity for the survival of the American experiment but as a key to the advancement of civilization. They may have been right, or they may have been wrong; but that is what they believed. Commerce would enlarge the mind, reduce prejudice, confer reciprocal benefits and diffuse enlightenment. As Melville had young Redburn put it, "Under the beneficent sway of the Genius of Commerce, all climes and countries embrace; and yard-arm touches yard-arm in brotherly love."

Professor Field gives full weight to the role of commerce in American expansionism; but, what is more important, he also gives full weight to other factors equally vital in fostering the expansionist outlook but ignored by Professor Williams and not reducible to economic motives. One of these factors is the missionary impulse, which, as Professor Field points out, probably did more than anything else to begin the Americanization of exotic corners of the planet. (In this connection one must mention the pioneer work of C. J. Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860,* written in 1954 but only recently published as a Harvard East Asian Monograph.)

Another factor on which Professor Field lays appropriate stress is the part played in expansionism by strategy and politics. It is true that the American Navy acquired its original forward role partly in order to protect the commerce of the young republic. But the Navy also had the job of protecting the security of the young republic; and it had its own institutional interests and ambitions. Nothing, I think, wrecks Professor Williams's account of the roots of the American empire more than his total disregard of the strategic and political motives in American imperial policy.

For where his overseas-markets thesis becomes vague and unsatisfactory is precisely at the point that the quest for economic markets moves into the passion for political domination. The "battle for markets," he writes at one point, "was not predestined to evolve into imperialism"; what it did, he says, was to confront the American people with "a choice between embracing imperialism or changing their domestic political economy in fundamental respects." Unwilling in the nineties to make such changes, the leaders, in the Williams view, then embarked on a course of active overseas expansion. "The exports that prevented domestic upheaval became the exports that required an imperial foreign policy." In order "to acquire and maintain free and effective access to

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all the markets of the world," the United States set out to overwhelm all nations that blocked the expansion of American exports and the establishment of the American empire.

All this assumes that exports led the way and the government tagged along behind. Yet a glance at the statistics shows that the chief American markets lay, not at all in the parts of the world where the United States sought to exert imperial sway, but in Europe. The China market, for example, has always been one of the great mirages of the American experience. May it not have been that those glowing invocations of the potentialities of foreign markets were less the expression of the urgencies of American capitalism than the bait, the lure, which political and military leaders held before business leaders in order to win support for policies advocated by the state for reasons of its own?

And what would such reasons be? The obvious answer is the assertion of national power. Now the assertion of national power is something that has always concerned American elites much more than it has concerned the American people. For, contrary to the revisionist mythology, the United States has not been all that persistently "an expanding imperial power." Jefferson and Benton, though they anticipated the colonization of the North American continent, did not foresee the political expansion of the United States; they thought that independent Anglo-Saxon republics would be established on the other side of the Rockies. John Quincy Adams, it is true, supposed that, in time, the United States and North America would be "identical," and Jefferson would have added Cuba to the identity. But these things never came to pass. We never annexed Canada; Texas waited outside the Union as an independent republic for a decade; the movement to acquire "all Mexico" failed; the Ostend Manifesto was a flop; except for Alaska, which Congress accepted with the utmost reluctance, Seward's expansionist program got nowhere; it took half a century of agitation before we annexed Hawaii, and this might never have taken place had it not been for the war with Spain; even with that war we did not annex Cuba. Despite the current idea of a people red hot for empire since 1776, the imperial dream has encountered consistent popular indifferences throughout American history. This has meant that our true expansionists — Seward, Mahan, Lodge, Roosevelt, for example — were far in advance of public and business opinion; hence the dangle of foreign markets and profits in an attempt to persuade opinion to come along.

This exercise in salesmanship should not obscure the fact that the essential motives for expansionism were noneconomic. The basic general

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reason for imperialism through history, I believe, lies in the disparity of power between the political and technological dynamism of an advanced country and the weakness and stagnation of an underdeveloped country. And the immediate reason for American adventures in empire has almost always been, not at all a quest for overseas markets (the vast markets of Hawaii? Samoa? Guam? Puerto Rico? the Philippines? Latin America? Vietnam? — we have always disposed of most of our export surplus in Europe and Canada) but the preemptive impulse — that is, the determination to control some bit of foreign land before another great power could get to it. Our expansion, from the Louisiana Territory through Texas, Oregon and California, Hawaii, Samoa and the Philippines, to Indochina, has been primarily a product of the international power competition.

Henry Cabot Lodge exposed the grounds of the turn-of-the-century imperialism with cogency in his famous *Forum* article in 1895. Here he condemned

> the doctrine that there is no higher aim or purpose for men or for nations than to buy and sell, to trade jack-knives and make everything cheap. No one underrates the importance of the tariffs or the still greater importance of a sound currency. But of late years we have been so absorbed in these economic questions that we have grown unmindful of others. We have had something too much of the disciples of the Manchester school who think the price of calico more important than a nation's honor, the duties on pig iron of more moment than the advance of a race.

What created the imperial outburst at the end of the nineteenth century were the ideas of a small elite for whom foreign markets mattered only as one component in the quest for national security, power and prestige. Professor Williams writes that, in the view of Theodore Roosevelt, "the new frontiers would be supplied by the continued overseas expansion of the American marketplace." This is fanciful in the extreme. Theodore Roosevelt could hardly have cared less about overseas markets *per se*. He had contempt for the prospects of a "gold-ridden, capitalist–bestridden, usurer-mastered future." As for "the typical big moneyed men of my country, I do not regard them as furnishing sound opinion as regards either foreign or domestic policies." Even Lodge could write, "The businessman dealing with a large political question is really a painful sight."

Roosevelt's cult of the "strenuous life" set forth the real motives behind his imperial dream: "If we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at the hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then

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the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world." In short, America had to meet the competition. Lodge put the case for American empire succinctly in his *Forum* piece: "The great nations are rapidly absorbing for their future expansion and their present defense all the waste places of the earth. . . . As one of the great nations of the world, the United States must not fall out of the line of march."

Raisons d'état, not reasons of the market, have created the American thrust for empire. The Caribbean used to be regarded as the classic case of "dollar diplomacy." But, as D. G. Munro showed conclusively in *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921,* it was the State Department which took the initiative in persuading a reluctant business and banking community to go into the Caribbean; and the State Department's object was not to make money for bankers but to diminish European influence in the area. Hans Morgenthau has accurately summed up the scholarly findings: "Economic determinism as a guide to the understanding of American foreign policy was discredited long ago by case studies that showed the extent to which the so–called dollar diplomacy of the turn of the century, seemingly a typical example of a foreign policy doing the bidding of economic interests, was a political policy using economic interests for the political purposes of the state rather than the other way around."

There is an easy way to test Professor Williams's proposition that American foreign policy has been determined by the needs of American capitalism for overseas markets. Let us take a hint from Max Weber's suggestion in his discussion of imperialism that we "make the mental experiment of assuming the individual polities to be somehow 'state–socialist' communities, that is, associations supplying a maximum amount of their needs through a collective economy." The problem, Weber wrote, "would hardly change fundamentally. . . . All political associations of such a collective economy would seek to buy as cheaply as possible indispensable goods not produced in their own territory. . . . It is probable that force would be used where it would lead easily to favorable conditions of exchange. . . . One cannot see why the strong state-socialist communities should disdain to squeeze tribute out of the weaker communities for their own partners, where they could do so." The record of the Soviet Union in dominating, exploiting and looting weaker communist states abundantly confirms Weber's analysis.

Professor Williams's argument is that, if only the United States had not been a capitalist society, it would not have engaged in the quest for empire. Following Weber, let us suppose for a moment that the United States never had a marketplace, that it had always been a communist

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state like the Soviet Union. Would a communist United States have been any less passionate to expand across the continent? Would it have been any happier to allow Great Britain, Germany, Russia to occupy strategic points in the western hemisphere or the surrounding oceans? Would it have refrained from dominating and exploiting the weaker states of Latin America? Would a communist United States not have reacted against the installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba by an anti-communist power from across the seas? Would a communist United States not be just as determined as a capitalist United States to take the measures it deemed necessary to protect its national security?

George Lichtheim wrote recently, "No one is ever going to claim that the United States got involved in Vietnam because it wanted the area's markets. The motivation was plainly political and strategic." He underestimated the infatuations of American scholars; for this is what Professor Williams and his disciples apparently do claim. Everything from the War of Independence and the Civil War to the Second World War and the war in Indochina is to be accounted for by this same obsession. One looks forward in due course to the Williams school's explanation of the latest manifestation of the American expansionist impulse — that is, the efforts of the men on Apollo 11 and 12 to stake out the American title, I guess, to those splendid new markets on the moon.

Still the phenomenon of American expansion exists; and, if the expansionist drive was not produced by capitalism's demand for overseas markets, what did produce it? I have suggested in general terms that it was produced by politicians and strategists, by men concerned a good deal less with the profits of producers and exporters than with the power and glory of the nation. Let us pursue this point a little further; for the really illuminating question, as Bert Hoselitz writes in his introduction to a recent edition of Schumpeter's "The Sociology of Imperialism," is not, what is imperialism? but, who are the imperialists? This is the question Schumpeter himself seeks to answer; and his answer, in my judgment, tells us far more about American imperialism than any form of the economic interpretation.

Schumpeter's argument was that imperialism existed long before capitalism and had nothing to do with capitalism; if anything, he thought, the rationalistic and prudential spirit of capitalism would militate against imperialism. The drive for empire through the ages, he said, arose essentially from the power within societies of a warrior class. There would always be rational pretexts for military action — national security, trade, investments, markets — but the essential urge for domination came from the sheer momentum of the military machine in motion. "Created by wars that required it," he wrote of the military establish-

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ment in ancient Egypt, "the machine now created the wars it required." The outburst of European imperialism toward the end of the nineteenth century was in this view atavistic — the last hurrah of an obsolescent warrior ethos.

In contending that the progress of capitalism would steadily eliminate the warrior class (and in supposing that the United States, as the purest form of capitalism, would be least likely to have martial propensities), Schumpeter omitted the possibility that war among modern states might produce a new warrior class and new forms of imperialism. Has not something like this happened in the United States? The American imperialism of the turn of the century was a clear case of Schumpeterian atavism. Men like Roosevelt, Lodge, Brooks Adams, Admiral Mahan, who as historians had celebrated the old Federalist vision of the American role, now hoped to redeem the new and odious commercial society by giving it a martial purpose. But the imperialism of the neo–Federalist elite could not last because it lacked a serious institutional base in American society. Half a century later, however, two World Wars had brought a great military establishment into existence, and the Cold War made it permanent. Contrary to Schumpeter's expectation, America at last had its warrior class.

Of course other factors helped make the climate which invited American intervention around the planet in the postwar years — the vacuums of power created by the Second World War, the doctrinaire execution of a perfectly honorable belief in a universal peace system, the old missionary faith in America's regenerative mission to suffering mankind, the quite real menace of Stalinist communism, the absolutist counterideology of anticommunism. All these things led the United States into attitudes of universalism and messianism. But the hard precipitating factor, which hastened us on into the catastrophe of Vietnam, was surely the influence and power of the new warrior class.

Schumpeter's account of the military imperialism of ancient Rome has an uncomfortable contemporary relevance. He called it

> that policy which pretends to aspire to peace but unerringly generates war, the policy of continual preparation for war, the policy of meddlesome interventionism. There was no corner of the known world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack. If the interests were not Roman, they were those of Rome's allies; and if Rome had no allies, then allies would be invented. When it was utterly impossible to contrive such an interest —why, then it was the national honor that had been insulted. The fight was always invested with an aura of legality. Rome was always being attacked by evil-minded neighbors, always fighting for a breathing space. The whole world was pervaded by a host of enemies.

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In whatever sense America can be said to have become an imperial state, the active carriers of that imperialism have not been Lenin's villains, the bankers and foreign investors, nor Professor Kolko's villains, the industrialists seeking raw materials, nor Professor Williams's villains, the exporters seeking foreign markets. The active carriers have been our politicians, diplomats and, most especially, our military leaders. Tocqueville foresaw this ago when he wrote his great chapter, "Why Democratic Nations Naturally Desire Peace, and Democratic Armies, War." "The army, taken collectively," Tocqueville said, "eventually forms a small nation by itself, where the mind is less enlarged and habits are more rude than in the nation at large. . . . A restless and turbulent spirit is an evil inherent in the very constitution of democratic armies and beyond hope of cure."

Let us take the case of escalation in Indochina. Has the clamor of American business for foreign markets been responsible for the widening of the war? To ask the question is to expose the fatuity of the Williams thesis. At every stage of our descent into the quagmire, the military have played the dominant role. First, they defined the problem as a military problem, requiring a military solution. Then, at each point along the ghastly way, the generals promised that just one more step of military escalation would bring the victory so long sought and so steadily denied. The Pentagon has not only succeeded in casting the problem in military terms; it has cherished the war for its own institutional reasons. Vietnam has become an invaluable testing ground for new weapon systems as well as an indispensable place for on-the-job training and for promotion. "Civilians can scarcely understand," General Shoup, the admirable former commandant of the Marine Corps, has written, ". . . that many ambitious professionals truly yearn for wars and the opportunities for glory and distinction afforded only in combat." All the services, General Shoup tells us, wanted part of the action in Vietnam and competed for "the opportunity to practice their trade." Here surely lies the operative cause of our imperial drift: the incessant pressure of the professional military in an age of incessant crisis.

Let me hastily distinguish the point I am making from the fashionable hyperbole about the military-industrial complex. The conception of the military-industrial complex implies that the military are nothing but the creatures of the business community, obediently carrying out the bidding of the business leaders. Only old Leninists like Dwight D. Eisenhower could believe that. What we must understand is that the military are *not* the agents of the businessmen; they have arisen as a powerful force in their own right, an entirely independent influence on the formation of national policy. Of course they have a complex network of al-

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liance with defense industry; but this serves primarily as a means of defending their political flanks in Congress; it rarely provides them with their motives and program.[2] Often the policies they urge — as in the later stages of the Indochina war — have been opposed by preponderant forces in the business community.

If all this is so, it suggests that imperialism is not rooted in a particular economic structure or system of ownership; and history confirms that this is indeed the fact. Every great power, whatever its ideology, has its warrior caste and thereby contains strong inner pressures toward the domination of weaker states. Let us look again at the Soviet Union. If what the Soviet Union has done in Czechoslovakia was not imperialism, then the term has no meaning; if it was imperialism, then we must dismiss the notion of imperialism as something uniquely rooted in capitalism. The probability is that the Soviet warrior caste, operating in the same way as the Amercan warrior caste, both operating much as Schumpeter described the warriors of ancient Rome, has successfully molded the policy of its country to its own purposes.

The question remains why scholars like Professor Williams and his school refuse to acknowledge the power of strategic and political motives or the role of the warrior class. Some New Left historians, like David Horowitz, for example (if he can be called an historian), are presumably reluctant to embrace a theory of imperialism which would implicate the Soviet Union. But Professor Williams, for whom Soviet motives look good only in comparison with what he seems to regard as the even worse motives of the United States, hardly falls into that category.

In his case, his theory of American imperialism evidently performs a political function. As he explains in a long, personal and not unappealing preface to his book, his hope is to establish the "relevance of history." The overseas-markets thesis thus hands him history as a weapon to wield against the marketplace. It enables him to argue that the United States can cure itself of the imperial psychosis *only* by abolishing capitalism. Hence the need to prove that imperialism is economic in its nature and derives from capitalism — and hence the unconscious rejection of all evidence showing other motives and bases for expansion and dominion.

Now Professor Williams may be right or wrong in espousing his brand of communitarian socialism. But this is a program to be con-

2 See, for example, the recent study by Perry McCoy Smith entitled *The Air Force Plans for Peace, 1943-1945* (Johns Hopkins Press). This shows that it was the Air Force itself, not the aircraft industry, that initiated the drive for the expansion of production facilities after the war.

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sidered on its own merits and not as part of an argument over foreign policy. The example of the Soviet Union leaves one cold about the proposition that the abolition of capitalism would affect impulses toward imperialism; for no change in the system of ownership will reduce the power of the professional military in a time of accelerating nuclear technology and chronic international crisis. In his passion to make history relevant, Professor Williams ends by abandoning both history and relevance.

As an account of the rise of the overseas-markets thesis in nineteenth–century America, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* is impressive. As an account of the roots of the modern American empire, it is pretentious, tendentious and shallow.

Howard Zinn

William Appleman Williams was writing eye-opening accounts of American expansionism while marooned alone for many years in a sea of conservative apologia and liberal timidity. (C. Wright Mills was on another island; even as outcasts they were kept apart by disciplinary rules.) That took courage. But with civilization at the crest of hypocrisy, the combat must be renewed every time the sun rises, and so Williams is still grappling with the question of how to write history that blows our minds clean of jingoism, that suggests we might live differently.

His job is complicated by an odd juncture of events: that he is no longer alone, and a flotilla of radical historians is pushing hard ahead, with cries for "relevance" from all sides; that the historical establishment, always nervous, reacts to this with their only real defense, scrutinizing the new radical history to see if "professional standards" are met (Oscar Handlin wrote such a haughty, empty review of Williams's *The Contours of American History* for the *American Historical Review* a few years back).

I am only guessing that these are the pressures on Williams. In any

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event, he writes as if they are. In lonelier times, he was effortlessly relevant. Now he shows all the signs of sweaty encounter with both radicals and traditionalists — a three-way orgy which leaves no real satisfaction. Yet, in the course of this, he presents a fascinating case study of exactly what we need to think about: how does a radical historian act out his radicalism (in his writing) and deal with the fact that he is a professional historian?

In his preface, Williams tells us who agonize about the present, that history *is* relevant. We can learn from past mistakes, because, while things are different now, they are not that different. We can see how certain attitudes persist, and try to change them.

All this is true, and hardly arguable on that level of generality. But it is exactly at such a point that we need to get wary, where we nod our heads so vigorously to general truths that the momentum keeps us nodding while a dubious jump is made. After posing a truly important question, the historian has a habit of moving swiftly into the details of some piece of history, with such an overwhelming display of research, with such occasional nuggets of satisfaction for the historical hedonist, that the original question has been forgotten.

Thus, after making the general statement that history can be relevant, Williams goes on in his preface to give us his theme: that the acknowledged post-1890 expansionism of the nation's metropolitan–industrial leaders was preceded by (and stimulated by) the development of expansionist thought among agrarian businessmen from 1860 to 1893. His introductory chapter, "A Survey of the Territory," summarizes this development, going back to the need for tobacco markets in the Revolutionary period, the hunger to expand north-south-west in the War of 1812, the felt need for Gulf Coast and Pacific Coast harbors in the eighteen forties and eighteen fifties, and the double effect of the Civil War: loss of the Mississippi egress to overseas markets; expanded exports to Europe. In the post-Civil War period, the agricultural businessman began to organize, and all the major political issues of the next thirty years involved his concern with overseas markets: the monetization of silver, tariff reciprocity, naval construction, the ownership of western lands and interventions in Hawaii, Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, the Philippines, China.

The fifteen chapters which make up the bulk of the book constitute an enormously detailed account of this interaction between the business farmer's desire for overseas markets and national political policies at home and abroad. This is supported with overwhelming documentation from farm journals, national archives documents, the papers of national

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leaders and unpublished doctoral dissertations. There are enough quotations in which farm businessmen urge expansion into overseas markets to leave us gasping.

But what does that mass of historical detail accomplish, except as a barricade of citations against the assaults of fellow professionals, who are known to get weak in the groin at the sight of manuscript material, unpublished letters and archival documents?

At the end of his preface, Williams performs the second part of the usual sleight-of-hand operation of the historian — the rush from the historical data back to the theme of relevance, so fast as to obscure the fact that the connection between the data and the relevant question is tenuous. Here are the last six sentences of his preface:

> American farmers evolved and agitated just such a militantly expansionist foreign policy between 1860 and 1893. That policy played a major causal role in the advent of American imperialism after 1893, and continued to exert a pervasive influence on American thinking about foreign affairs throughout the twentieth century.
>
> So we return to the relevance of history. American farmers, acting at a time when they composed the great majority of the nation's population, were crucial actors in developing an outlook that has carried our contemporary industrialized system to a major crisis in foreign affairs. If we can understand that history as a prelude to changing those ideas and policies, then we nonagrarians who compose the great majority of today's Americans can give the other (largely agrarian) peoples of the world a chance to make their own history by acting on our own responsibility to make our own history. If that be isolationism, then the time has come to make the most of it.

That passage tells it all: Williams's laudable intent, his historical findings, and the weak connection between those findings and that intent. If our objective is "changing those ideas and policies" (so that other peoples of the world will no longer suffer from them) how does the specific message of this book (that the post-1893 expansionism of American corporate and metropolitan leaders was preceded by militant expansionist thought among farmers) accomplish that objective? I cannot see that it does. How does knowing that it was *farmers* as well as industrialists who believed in expansionism add to what we already know: that the United States was expansionist in its policy, and that this was supported by an ideology of Manifest Destiny, bringing freedom and Christianity and democracy to the benighted heathen, Wilsonian idealism and so on? How does the stress on the pre-1893 period help up? We already know expansionism was continuous as fact and as ideology

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throughout our history. Williams's own book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy,* told us both these things.

Is it, then, the corollaries of this thesis that are important? For instance, that it was not merely a small elite that pushed and rationalized expansionism but, in Williams's constantly reiterated phrase, "the agricultural majority of the country"? Here Williams falls into the common error of more orthodox historians of assuming that the voices of the leadership echo those of the mass. His evidence of expansionist sentiments is drawn from the statements of leaders of the agrarian movements, and journals of farm opinion. Throughout the book, he seems to use "agricultural majority" and "farm businessmen" interchangeably. Any farmer who produces for even the smallest local market is a "farm businessman" but his documentation is clearly from the bigger farm businessman. What of the subsistence farmers, migrant farm laborers, tenant farmers, sharecroppers? What of the black farm population of the South, which was huge in that period?

But let us assume that the majority of farmers, even if not vociferous advocates of expansionism, were a silent majority giving passive support to the policy. What does this tell us beyond what we know; that in any era, the tendency is for the ideology of the leadership of society to pervade the rest of the society, as in the case of workingmen in our era and the war in Vietnam. Now if Williams were to show us not the *fact* of this pervasiveness of ideology, but the *process* by which it is made to take effect, we might learn something about the creation of consciousness among masses of people. But we do not get this.

Or take another subthesis of the book: that, from the Revolutionary period on, the agricultural expansionists "tied freedom for individual men to the existence of a free marketplace." But this is no more than the universal (not just American, but worldwide; not just agrarian, but industrial) justification for aggression in terms of benefiting other people. At the very end of his introductory overview, Williams seems to promise to show us the process by which this profit-taking freedom of the entrepreneur is confused with the personal freedom of all: "If we can understand how we became an imperial metropolis in the name of the freedom and prosperity of the country, then perhaps we can free our minds and our wills to achieve freedom and prosperity without being an imperial society."

But that promise is not fulfilled; instead we get an endless recounting of the *fact* of this confusion, through a series of quoted statements. The promise, if met, would be most relevant to a strategy of social change; we might learn how to disentangle the complex mythology con-

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tained in the one word "freedom." The factual exposition does not tell us anything more than that farm leaders expressed the same confusion that industrial leaders did, and that this was transmitted to the population at large.

Let us now go back to Williams's aim of writing history whose purpose would be "changing those ideas and policies" of militant expansionism. And let me present two different models for accomplishing this purpose.

In the first model, which I will call the Radical Model, we ask: what are some of the crucial elements in the process by which a citizen unaware either of the fact of expansionism, or the undesirability of its consequences, might gain such awareness that he might be induced to change his ideas and work to transform the government's policies? Let me suggest a few of these elements:

1.) learning from historical evidence that the U.S. did indeed pursue over a long period of time policies of aggressive expansion (thus demolishing traditional notions that we are "different," that we tend to mind our own business, that we only leave our territory to help others in distress);

2.) seeing the *effects* of that expansionism on other peoples (thus dissolving the myth that we brought democracy and prosperity to those we came to dominate);

3.) learning what *interests* were involved (which were advanced, and which were retarded) — thus destroying the notion that disinterested idealism was the main motivation, disposing of the idea that the majority of Americans gained either security or prosperity from expansion;

4.) learning how the above facts were mystified by national leaders, how they became a generally accepted mythology: how symbols like "freedom" and "national interest" and "making the world safe for democracy" and "self-determination" were used to cover harsh actions for crass motives; how the "Open Door," the "Good Neighbor" and the "Alliance for Progress" could fool us all (thus suggesting what is necessary to pull apart that mythology).

These four points are only the beginning of the Radical Model. They expose what has happened, who has been benefited and who hurt, and how has all this been concealed. We can think of additional jobs for a radical historian: to show the possibility of a system that does not require imperial expansion (by finding moments and places in the past where such a future was even faintly foreshadowed); to show the means by which we might move from the present situation to that preferable

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one (by showing how, in the past, old institutions have fallen, how movements for change have succeeded, how consciousness has been transformed).

Much of the literature of "revisionist" history of American foreign policy has aimed at one or more of the four points above, thus helping to change the public consciousness. We might cite some outstanding examples: D. F. Fleming's *The Cold War And Its Origins,* Gabriel Kolko's *The Politics of War* and *The Roots of American Foreign Policy,* Harry Magdoff's *The Age of Imperialism,* David Horowitz's *The Free World Colossus,* Gar Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy,* I. F. Stone's *The Hidden History of the Korean War.* And William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy.*

In the second model (which I will term the Professional Model), we would follow a different procedure. We would acknowledge in some general way the need to make the world better, to eliminate war, aggression, poverty, intolerance, alienation, and express the hope that history may help us in that purpose. Then we would turn to (or rather, *jump* to, because if we only turned a bit, we might easily, by turning again slightly, remind ourselves of our original aim) some specific historical "question" and amass huge piles of data around it. We would easily forget our original aim (changing things) because specific pieces of the data, and the questions we posed, would be *interesting.* The ambiguity of the concept "interesting" would help us make our jump, because we would have started with one meaning of the word (serving an interest, such as social change) and ended up working on another meaning (satisfying our intellectual curiosity, filling a gap in the professional literature). The greater the documentation in answering the second interest, the easier to hide the lack of connection with the first interest. The result is to fulfill Tolstoy's definition of the historian as a deaf man answering questions no one has asked. (Except that, as Tolstoy was coming to the end of his life, the professional historian emerged, to ask those questions himself, and thus to give work to a new, enormous priesthood.)

In *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy,* and in other of his writings, William Appleman Williams met the first model — the Radical Historian. In *The Roots of the Modern American Empire,* it seems to me he more closely fits the second model — the Professional Historian. He inundates us with data to answer professionally interesting questions: who was expansionist first, the agricultural businessman or the industrial businessman? when did expansionist ideology become important, before or after 1890? But what does this do for us? We know that the market economy of the modern world, based as it is on national

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power in an era of international economics (and therefore a characteristic of socialist national states as well as capitalist), will tend to expansion, exploitation, rapaciousness. It therefore is expected that when the market economy is in its predominantly agrarian stage, the agrarian businessmen will dominate the talk and action of expansion, and that, as the economy becomes increasingly industrial, the manufacturing interests will become more important.

There are points of *real* interest here: the especially powerful drives of capitalist economies to expansionism, and the fact that socialist economies, so long as they are *national,* will have expansionist tendencies too. Understanding this, along with the human consequences of expansion, can teach us something about the necessity for replacing the capitalist mode of production, and also for replacing the nationalist form of socialism.

On the other hand, the distinction between agrarian and industrial expansionism is primarily of academic interest. The periodicization question (did expansionism take hold before or after 1890?) is a typically professional preoccupation, equally irrelevant to the objective Williams set at the beginning: "changing those ideas and policies." They are not of interest to any of the elements of that objective: understanding *why* change should take place, understanding *what* changes should take place, understanding *how* change might be brought about. Understanding the cognitive reality, the normative models, the process of transformation — one or more of these must be served by a truly radical history.

When one labors after points of professional interest, the strain shows. Thus, Williams wants to show not only a *post hoc* relationship between agrarian and industrial expansion, but an *ergo propter hoc* — not just a temporal, but a causal relationship. This takes a stretching of the evidence. He must also strain to find a "better balance" between personal freedom and marketplace freedom among agrarians than among metropolitans.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Professional Model is one I have not yet mentioned: the insistence on keeping separate the role of historian and the role of citizen. Williams presents, in his final pages, a modified version of this, asking that the historian cultivate "a conscious, controlled, and creative schizophrenia." That is, the historian must maintain some distance between himself as scholar and himself as citizen.

As a historian, Williams says, a person "has one primary responsibility: to do his best to reconstruct what happened and to explain how and why it occurred." (This is exactly the orthodoxy of the professional historian, and exactly the opposite of Marx's admonition to the philos-

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opher to stop merely interpreting the world, but to change it, *as* a philosopher, not in some quick-change role as citizen.) Williams distinguished between "the meaning" of the past, which he says the historian can offer, and "what to do about the meaning" which "is not a question that the historian qua historian can answer," but presumably can be answered as the historian switches quickly to his role as citizen. He admits it is hard to keep the roles separate but "the effort must be made" if the historian "is to offer anything of value" to anyone.

He then proceeds to tell us, in his final pages, the "three primary meanings" of his research: that the marketplace outlook of "the agricultural majority," mixing profit freedom and personal freedom, "provided the dynamic causal force for a steady movement by the majority toward an imperial foreign policy"; that the metropolitan minority accepted this outlook while consolidating their control of the political economy, leading to "a war against Spain and the formulation of a grand strategy for such imperial expansion of the free American marketplace"; that farm businessmen and metropolitan leaders both failed "to maintain an operating balance between the expansion of freedom and the expansion of the marketplace," the result being "an overpowering imperial consensus that defined freedom in terms of what existed in America."

Williams then says: "Those meanings that I offer as a historian do not, however, tell me what to do as a citizen." By asking the impossible of history — "what to do" — Williams dodges the possible: exposing that in the past which in some way leads the reader to *want* to do something. By separating the historian's work from the citizen's concerns, he ends up with "meanings" which fly off into space, aimed at questions of professional interest only. He has told us he is interested in "changing those ideas and policies" which have brought our present crisis in foreign affairs, but for this his "meanings" are academic and empty.

Then, turning to "questions for me as a citizen and for other citizens as citizens" he asks: is marketplace freedom a limiting concept of freedom? and do its actual operations limit real freedom even more stringently than the conceptual limitations suggest? If they do, even to some extent, what kind of changes, reformist or revolutionary, will be necessary? These are important questions, but they do not arise from the research in this book, nor does the book aim at answering them.

Here we have the common condition of the professional historian who cares about the world: he starts off with a strong indignation against a particular social evil he wants to eliminate, and muses vaguely about writing history that will help; he then plunges into historical re-

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search, deflected from his original quest by the pull of orthodox historical problems (who did what first, and when? and what did they say in doing it?) which have just enough remote connection with the original issue to maintain the fiction that he is still pursuing it. Finally, after all the research, he turns abruptly to some of the crucial questions which originally bothered him. The fervor of his original concern, the overwhelming data piled up in his historical research, the importance of his final speculations — all hide the lack of connection among his three operations.

At the very end, the questions Williams asks have nothing to do with his research, which has not suggested those questions, nor answered them in any way. They just represent his abrupt return to the suffering world after his long professional digression. He asks radicals: is "doing one's thing" comparably dangerous to Adam Smith's marketplace freedom? is doing *our* own thing a step toward imposing our values on others? should we not therefore think about decentralized forms of society which avoid uniformity? do we really "win" when we adopt the immoral tactics of the other side? These are good questions, but they are more logically the beginning of some other book than the end of this one.

The historian is not two persons: historian and citizen. The schizophrenia that Williams wants us to "cultivate" is not healthy. The historian is one person, a citizen granted extra time to read and write, whose recovery of pieces of the past should not get in the way of his remembering that his chief concern is the present and future.

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Russell Banks

THE BLIZZARD

A low, mottled grey sky, smooth and unbroken in texture. The man stands, hands jammed in pockets, next to the neatly stacked, head-high woodpile, looking first up at the sky, then down to his feet, and he smiles beneath his thick moustache and shakes his head, as if remembering something that had been funny long ago and only to him. Taking long strides, he crosses behind the barn and walks along the side opposite the house, moving gracefully through high, brown meadow grass to the front, where the driveway ends. As he passes near the car, a Volkswagen sedan, he flips his hand down and without breaking his stride raps the vehicle once on the roof. He is a tall, not heavy, man, with a huge head made even larger by the bushy, dark brown moustache that droops across his lower face. He moves with a strange, hurried grace: there is an urgency to his walk and in the slightly forward tilt of his shoulders and head, as if he has not been able to make himself altogether comfortable inside his body. His large, heavy hands swing with relaxed precision, however. He can reach out great distances and touch quickly, without first having to think of it, whatever he wants to touch. They are the kind of hands that would be good with tools but clumsy with the buttons of his own clothing. He walks to the side entrance of the house, reaches forward and opens the door, and as he brings the rest of his body into the house, he grins and says into the kitchen, We'll have snow tomorrow. Then he closes the door behind him.

When I become cold, it begins in my feet and fingertips and quickly moves in from there. As long as those far extremities are warm, even if I have no hat or coat on, the rest of my body stays

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comfortably warm. Before I grew my moustache, my face was the first part of my body to feel the cold.

He reached down and across the kitchen table and grabbed his wife's arm just above the elbow and yanked her to her feet, shaking her once, holding her elbow high in the air so that she seemed to dangle from it. The flesh on her face stiffened and drew forward protectively, her head pulled down close to her shoulders, her one free hand clutching vainly at the hard, outside surface of his viselike grip, and when he bellowed into her face, she began to sob. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I don't know what else to do! she cried. Then he bellowed a second time. Just be quiet! You are making us miserable over nothing! *Nothing!*

This seems to be how the winter works on me, and what follows immediately from that work: first, I lose my hold on my sense of myself, then of my life as some kind of a continuing history. Then of my wife, and finally, of my children. The progression goes on out from there, until at last, by the time the first trickles of spring appear, I am like a vaguely discolored fluid, floating on the surface of a stagnant sea.

The how and the what, then, are easy to say and understand. The difficult question, the true question here, is *why.*

It's difficult for me even to ask it, not to mention answering, for every time, and as soon as, I do ask it, I know that I'm no longer talking about the weather. If the answer in fact did have anything to do with the weather, if it somehow were able to explain to me the aggressive working of the winter upon my mind's hold on itself and the world, if it were able to show me that, from November to April, I was being ravished by nothing more than the incessant waves of snow and cold — then it would be a simple matter to move to another climate. I would merely move my chair closer to the fire.

But I don't do that. I keep my chair where it has always been. On the north side of the house and as close to the door as possible. Which confuses me, confuses me now, today, when winter has just begun. In a month, of course, I won't be confused, at least not in this particular way, because the question will have been lost and I will have given up the search for it. In two months I will have forgotten that there ever existed such a question. I'll be unable even to speak of it.

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The problem, for me and in many ways for the people around me, is that when I *am* able to speak of it, that is, in the fall and at the beginning of winter, it's only because I have just regained my full strength. I believe this. The spring and summer healings have brought me to a point by late fall where once again I feel like a solid block of ice, and the world around me has distinction and, of itself, variety. This for me is a time of unabated pleasure, which can be broken only by my reminding myself of how precarious a time it is, and how brief.

What's going on? my wife has asked me. No, really, what the hell is going on?

I don't know what you mean. Nothing. (There's little else I can say at such a time.)

You know damned well what I mean. This silent bit. It's not exactly something new to me, you know. It could be kind of cute, if I happened to be meeting you for the first time. But I'm not meeting you for the first time. I'm your wife, remember? And we've been together for quite a while now. So what's going on?

Nothing. (I was sitting in the chair by the kitchen door, waterproofing my boots with Neatsfoot Oil. At daybreak the snow had started falling. Now, three hours later, two inches of fine, hard powder had accumulated.)

Who are you? Gary Cooper? Can't you say anything more than *nothing?* I've heard nothing but monosyllables out of you for the past three weeks!

Sorry. (I pulled my boots on over my Norwegian wool socks.)

My wife sat down at the far end of the kitchen table, her elbows on the table and her chin resting on her fisted hands. She looked slightly angry, flirting with fear. Are you going to *talk* to me? I know something's happened. I've been through this before with you. We both have.

What are you talking about? I asked, standing in my boots, wiggling my toes inside. (When your feet are comfortable, your entire body relaxes and enjoys your feet's small pleasure vicariously.)

You *know* what I'm talking about! *Guilt!* She hissed the word at me without moving her lips or teeth, and I knew that she had flopped over, from anger to fear.

Ridiculous, I said, smiling. Guess again.

Don't you take me lightly.

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I'm not. You're simply wrong. That's all. There's nothing the matter, and there's nothing going on. I just haven't had much to say lately, that's all. Been busy and kind of preoccupied, I guess.

Really? she said, sneering. Well, I *know* you, mister, and I know what it means when you go silent on me. If you're wise, you'll talk to me, and you'll do it now, while I can still be sympathetic. We've been through all this before, too many times, and we both know what the consequences are, and we both know how to avoid those consequences. So *talk!*

Listen, I said. I've got to spend all day cutting wood for the stoves and shoveling snow. We can't spend all day talking about something that doesn't exist. Tonight we'll talk, if you still think there's something going on. But really, it's nothing.

Yes, I'm sure that's what you think. And that's why you're keeping silent, so you can go on thinking that it's nothing. For once in our lives, I ought to let you go ahead and try to live with your silent self. If I had enough distance on you, believe me, I'd just keep quiet and let your silence take you as far as it could. Then, finally, you might believe me when I tell you that something has happened.

Wal, I can't say as how I believe you this morning. And since we happen to be discussing *my* life, I guess I'll just have to pull rank and act as the final authority. I gave her a friendly smile.

She grimly said nothing. I put on my coat and went out into the snow. Usually, when I go from the house to the barn, I go by way of the connecting shed — the long narrow structure that runs like an umbilical cord from the house to the barn, a building that yearly comes a little bit closer to approximating a finished studio — but this time, with the first snow falling, I wanted to come into my studio from outside, stamping my feet and brushing snow off my sleeves, shedding the heavy coat and going right to work.

The man stumbles into the carpeted lobby of the motel, waking the half-asleep room clerk with the blast of wind and snow that enters with him. The clerk looks up at the man, who towers over the impeccable counter — a tall man, hatless, wearing a dark blue, wool overcoat, ice and snow laid down in thick strips across his head and shoulders. He plops his scarlet hands heavily down on the counter in front of the clerk, a small, old man wearing a flannel shirt and wool necktie. Forty-seven, the man in the overcoat says. His voice is

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soft and low and he speaks slowly. I'm in room forty-seven. He goes into his pocket, and drawing out his room key, dangles it in front of the clerk's wide-open face. I want two things, the man says. Yes, sir, the clerk answers. First, my car. It's stuck downtown on Main Street, right next to a place called The Home Port. It's a black Volkswagen sedan and can be towed back here easily. Do you know of someone you can get at this hour who'll tow my car back here? The clerk nods affirmatively. Good. The second thing I want is to be wakened at six. The clerk zips out his ball-point pen and writes down carefully, *Wake 47 at 6:00.* Is that it? he asks. Yes, the man answers. He reaches into his pocket again, this time pulling out his wallet, and hands the clerk a five-dollar bill. This is to cover your trouble in making sure that my car gets back here tonight. I assume that the towing charges can be added to my bill? Right, the old man says. We have a kid with a jeep here all night, plowing, you know. He'll run down and get your car for you. All right, the man says. I'll be checking out in the morning. Yes, sir, the clerk answers. Good night, sir.

Listen to me, it's fine for you to lie there and tell me all about my kind of guilt syndrome, you can tell me all about it all night long if you want, and I'll lie quietly next to you and listen closely and with gratitude. You're an extremely intelligent woman who's blessed with remarkable insight. I can appreciate all that. God knows how important to both of us your particular insights into my guilt syndrome have been. Frankly, they've managed to save our marriage. I can confess that. No, really. I *must* confess that. I don't want to end up feeling guilty for unspoken gratitude, now do I? No. Okay, then. What I was saying is that it's all well and good for you to lie there and tell me how convoluted my guilt syndrome is, how I bury it with wordy evasions, lies, rationalizations and buck-passing, and it's all right for you to observe to me that one of my most effective devices, when confronted by something for which I must feel guilt, is simple silence and outright detachment. You're right about all that. I'm not arguing with you over it. I concede it. Personally, I think that these are the kinds of insights on your part that have saved our marriage. I don't think we'd be married today if you hadn't pushed them into my face, again and again. I mean this. Ten years we've

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been married, and if it hadn't been for your persistence and your patience in making the truth of these insights self-evident to me, we wouldn't have been married for more than the first three years. A lot of growth. Lots of changes. On both our parts. And mine have had to come in just this area, over my inability to handle guilt. But to get back to what I was saying, just because my usual response to a guilt-situation *is* silence and detachment, this does not mean conversely that, whenever I've gone silent on you and *seem* to be detached and withdrawn, I am reacting to conscious knowledge of some offense I've committed. No. It's quite possible, see, that I can turn silent and seem withdrawn for no reason that has anything to do with any offense *or* guilt. Okay, so then you'll come back at me and argue, with some justification, I admit, that I don't need a specific offense in order to feel challenged by guilt, that it's part and parcel of my entire consciousness of my relation to the rest of the world. This may be true, it *is* true, I suspect. But what we're talking about here are *symptoms*. *Effects*. Not causes. You can argue from causes to effects, if you want to, but when it comes to my guilt syndrome, you've got no right to start arguing back from the effects, you know. After all, my silence and my seeming detachment can be caused by many things. What if I had a stroke or something and couldn't speak at all? What would you say then, that I was avoiding coming to grips with my guilt-consciousness? Or what if I were grieving? What if, just as an example, I happened to be holding some terrible news about *your* health? That you had terminal cancer, say? Or maybe I'm worried about my work, maybe I'm not going to be able to make the mortgage payment. You haven't asked me, you know. All you've done is assume that I'm acting out of some convoluted guilt syndrome again. I've been unusually silent these past few weeks, you tell me, and I seem to be uninvolved with you, with your daily life. Okay. Fine. So I'm a little less communicative than usual. There might be lots of reasons for that. You might try asking me what *I* think, you know. And so I *seem* to be uninvolved with your daily life. That's *your* impression. Which, as far as I can see, could as easily be a simple insecurity on your part as something concretely true of my behavior. In other words, my seeming uninvolvement could as much be a false impression as a true one, depending on whether or not it's a direct result of your fearful assumption that

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my silence, which *is* concretely true of my behavior, is a symptom of my difficulties in dealing with a rather extreme sense of personal guilt. So what if I happen to have difficulties in dealing with a rather extreme sense of personal guilt? That's *my* problem, isn't it? Not yours. Silence and detachment aren't exactly the worst things the woman has to bear in most marriages, you know. I mean, it's only a *temporary* silence, and it's never more than a *failed* attempt at detachment. You know this. Eventually I always start to talk again, little by little, evasively, I know, but eventually I circle back to you, and from there to my particular offense and guilt, and from there to my general guilt. You've never seen it work any other way, have you? I might ask what the hell you're afraid of in the first place. In this case here, you can be sure that if there *were* some particular offense I had committed, I would finally return to it, would confess it to you, would admit that, yes, I did make a pass at Rose, as she claimed I did, for example. Just for example. And once there, you can rest assured that I would admit that I had overreacted, had treated a particular, minor offense as if it were a general, lifelong one, that therefore I had reacted to a small offense in terms of my consciousness of an overall guilt. I mean, this is what has always happened, isn't it? No exceptions. None whatsoever, not in ten years. So why are you so determined now to conclude from my silence and my *seeming* detachment that I necessarily must be reacting to a failure to confront my guilt for a minor offense? You don't have to worry about it, because if I were, you'd know it by now. You always have. Why is this any different? What are you afraid of? That something dreadful will happen if you don't push and shove me back over the past few weeks all the way to some forgotten, ignored, completely minor offense against you? What the hell are you afraid of?

She told me to shut my goddamned mouth. Shut your goddamned mouth. Low and level, the words came out like looping circles of rope that cleanly hooped one after the other around my head, and I shut my goddamned mouth. The others in the room, also women, stared quickly down at the coffee-cup cluttered tabletop between them, fingered their paper napkins. One of them, Rose, I think, said, Jesus, it's hot by this stove, and moved her chair without getting out of it, bumping it against the floor of the kitchen, down the side of the rectangular table and away from the wood-

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stove. My wife got up and with a sharp twist turned the damper down and returned to her chair without looking at me. They went back to what they had been talking about — Rose's mother. The three women, my wife, tall and dark, and her two shorter, unmarried friends, leaning intently across the kitchen table, fooling with coffee cups and paper napkins and cigarettes, one or two of the three talking in pleasant, intimate voices about a mother: as if I had not come in from the barn demanding to know who in hell had left the water running, because the goddamned pump was sucking air again, and for Christ's sake, this was not Megalopolis and if the well goes dry we'll be up shit's creek, and it meant that now I'd have to shut off the pump and leave us without water at all for hours, until the water table comes back, *if* the water table comes back, and *if* the goddamned pump hasn't already burned itself out from sucking air for God knows how long. What the hell's the matter with you? I asked her. Can't you hear the grinding noise it makes when it starts to suck air? And it was also as if my wife had not told me to shut my goddamned mouth.

Where are you going? was what she said, almost casually, as I stomped across the kitchen and pulled my coat off the hook by the door. I glared at her. Then I stuffed my arms into the heavy coat, yanked open the door and stalked out into the blowing snow, closing the door with a quick jerk, as if pulling my hand out of a pan of hot water.

The Volkswagen started gradually, reluctantly, stiff in the late afternoon cold, but it started. While the motor warmed up, I got out of the car and thrashed through the piling snow and with my bare hand brushed the windows clean. Coming around from the far side of the car, I caught a glimpse of my wife's face at the kitchen door. She was staring quizzically through the small, square window in the door, as if at the weather. Then she turned away and disappeared. I got into the car, backed it slowly down the driveway to the road, leaving foot-deep ruts in the snow behind me, then drove lurchingly away, plowing carelessly through the small, shifting drifts. A half-mile of unpaved, snow-banked road, the car busting the fast-building drifts that lined the inside edge of the snowbanks, spraying high, white foxtails over the fenders, and I was on the main road. It was nearly dark, so I switched on the headlights. Turning left, I headed towards Portsmouth. The main road had already been

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plowed (huge, orange plows would cruise up and down the road from Portsmouth to Concord all night long), and consequently the driving was much easier than I had anticipated.

Although I am in love with the woman, the pressure of living with her doesn't let up, even after ten years. The kind of pressure I'm talking about has nothing to do with my being me, or being male, even. Yet it can't be the same for her, because of the fact that she is *there,* on the one hand, and is talking, constantly talking, prodding, shoving, probing, on the other. The words alone would not be sufficient to box me in. The words alone, when they happen to be true (that is, accurate), merely disappear as quickly as they're uttered; and when they're not true, the words, *her* words, just fall to our feet and flop over on their sides, dead, like so many flat slabs of rock. But the fact that she is *there,* undeniably so, coupled with the fact that she is talking, talking, talking — these two constantly present-tense facts produce in me the need to answer, and suddenly I find myself boxing myself in with my *own* words. They swirl out of my mouth like an odor, and as soon as they have separated themselves from my body, they solidify, as if by magic, and make a wall. Then more words follow, making a wall inside the first. Then still more words, and yet another, nearer wall. Until my body has been jammed into a rectangular cube of precisely my body's volume. No more, no less. And comfortless, I go silent.

As a result, over the years the women who have attracted me more and more frequently have been silent women. I think, no, I'm *sure,* that I was attracted to Rose, for example, purely and simply because of her silence. She almost never speaks, except to refer to some particular, physical circumstance. I am cold. I am too warm. I am tired. I am not tired. And so on. In place of words, Rose offers an infinite number of tones of silence, each of which, when heard, can be understood in countless ways. She smiles with her lips, and I start asking myself, *Wanly? Condescendingly? Coyly? Idly? Cruelly? Seductively?* In other words, she creates for me the possibilities of a specific attitude towards me, an attitude she will gladly bear, yet one that I am free to determine. *Seductively,* I decide, with a bit of *Coyly* tempered with *Idly.* And so I go ahead and place my two hands onto her waist, sliding them down to her hips, pulling her to me, and as she turns her face up to mine, her eyes wide open, I kiss her on the mouth and ear and throat.

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That was all. I didn't make love to her (my wife was in the kitchen, getting ice from the refrigerator, Rose and I were standing in the middle of the living room, Rose's boyfriend, the grade school teacher, was in the bathroom, flushing the toilet while pissing, to cover the splash of his urine's fall into the water). I let go of Rose, went over to the record player and put on a record; she went back to reading the titles on the spines of the books. Now that it's about to begin, I said to her from my corner of the room (just as my wife came in with the ice), what do you think of our New Hampshire winters? Not much, she said, smiling at the books. They begin too early, and from what I've heard, they last too long, she said. We talked that way, in code, for the entire evening, right in front of my wife and Rose's grade school teacher boyfriend. My wife, more beautiful than Rose, grew bored rather early and, as a result, silent, and by ten she was yawning and making sleepy references to how early she had to get up to get the kids ready in time for school. Rose's boyfriend (whose name I could not remember for longer than thirty seconds at a time) spent the evening in unrelenting, embarrassed discomfort, mainly, I think, because of the way I ignored him and attended constantly to Rose. And I did make a number of unnecessary references both to waterfalls and to the noisy plumbing of the house, how you could hear water gushing, like a waterfall, all through the house every time someone used the toilet. I remember that he wanted badly to tell me all about his mother's having recently taken up ceramics, at the remarkable age of sixty-four. But I kept interrupting him with the story of my friend's arthritic thumb and forefinger on his left hand, the way he had turned their dead rigidity to his advantage as a potter, adding several times that arthritis can actually aid a potter in his work, as long as it affects no more than a couple of fingers and doesn't stiffen an entire hand. He pretended to be relieved to hear that. I smiled. He and Rose left early. My wife and I made love for a long time and fell asleep immediately after and together.

After phoning my wife from the motel, informing her that I had no intention of coming home again as long as she remained there, I went out to look for a woman. My plan had been simply to drive to downtown Portsmouth, and avoiding the bars that catered strictly to seamen, to find a crowded, neighborhood bar. I pictured a woman slightly older than I, in her late thirties, say, or maybe around forty, still attractive, and lonely, because her husband would be at sea, either

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on a fishing boat off the Grand Banks or else assigned as chief petty officer to a Navy training ship based in Portsmouth and on winter maneuvers somewhere east of Norfolk. That was my plan. I would talk to her with sympathy and intelligence, buying her drinks, and when the bar closed at one A.M., we'd stroll down the street, arm in arm, like the good friends that we would have become by then, to her small, cozy apartment, where, before we went to bed, she'd make me a cup of tea. We would talk quietly for a few minutes longer. Then we'd make love, and it would be gently exhilarating to both of us, and afterwards we'd fall into a peaceful sleep. In the morning I would decide what I was going to do with the wreckage of my life. I would talk about it with her, and she would give me sound advice.

I had not anticipated the blizzard, however. For that's what it had become, a true blizzard. It was still November, the winter's first snowfall — usually amounting to little more than an inch or two of light powder that melts the next day — but by the time I got to the Holiday Inn outside Portsmouth, after a harrowing forty mile drive, over a foot of snow had accumulated, and it was beginning to come down in large, wet blossoms. I must have ignored these facts and their implications, because when I came out of the motel room and got into the car again, I was astonished to see that the windshield was completely covered with snow, even though the motor (and the windshield wipers) had been shut off for not more than three or four minutes — just long enough for me to go into the room, close the door behind me, cross to the telephone table between the beds, and dialing the number of my home telephone, say to my wife, This is to tell you that I'm not coming home tonight, so don't wait up for me.

What? When *are* you coming home, then? Her voice was small and sounded very far away.

I can't hear you, I said.

I said when *are* you coming home, then?

Well, I guess I won't be coming home as long as you're there.

Do you mean that?

Yes. I do.

All right. Then she hung up the phone.

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If this indeed was the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, its narrow, crooked streets rapidly disappearing in snow, the ledges of the run-down Federalist houses puffing white in the cold swirl of darkness, the pinched-in sidewalks all but deserted, the numberless barrooms and restaurants closed up for the night, an unseasonable night no matter how it was regarded, and if that white, turtle-shaped heap of snow next to me and in the middle of the street was in fact my black Volkswagen, stuck in wet, packed snow that came up to the tops of the hub caps, if all this was true — then I must have been the person who was standing in the street, the tall man with the tiny icicles in his moustache. He was five miles from the room he had rented at the Holiday Inn (he had wanted to avoid rooming houses in the city). He was hatless and without gloves, though he did have on a warm coat with a high collar and a waterproofed pair of insulated, leather boots. He started walking, slowly at first, then at a faster pace, and soon he wasn't cold and was enjoying the night and the snow and the sea-chilled wind that came raucously at him from behind, from the sea, shoving him along his way, helping him, even, so long as he was headed inland. At that time, as he stumbled, walked and finally jogged happily through the streets of Portsmouth in the middle of a blizzard, I could not believe that I was anyone other than the man with the icicles in his moustache. I was on both sides of his eyes, inside and outside as well, and his eyes were filled with water. It occurred to me that the man might die, that he might have caught pneumonia and was feverish, or that unknowingly he had for years been carrying inside him a killing disease that now, when he was most vulnerable, had decided to strike him down. It occurred to me that he was insane. It occurred to me that he was not insane.

He woke, expecting the storm to be over and the sun to be shining on a soft, white world. It was not over. The sky was still low and mottled grey, the snow blowing from the northeast, the wet air unseasonably, dully cold. The drive back to his house seemed interminable.

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POEMS by Irving Weinman

BYRON IN KENSINGTON

Nightime and ocean. Can there be more?
The fourteen year old girl undressed before
my eyes is unaware. I stare
through dirty windows at the smudge of hair
across the airshaft in the next big flat;
perhaps I dream the pubic hair, at that.
God knows I do my best to fill this too-big flat:
my pregnant wife sails in her tenth-month bed
alone, booms out her blanket like a Genoa jib;
the ocean moves inside her and she moans a bit.

I voyage through the toilet-tiled halls
into my empty study; empty though the walls
hang fat with books. I look about me
aimlessly, thumb through dumb anthologies
from Beowulf to James Baldwin: I'm caught by Lovelace —
"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage —"
I see dirty windows and dull red brick;
my subjective correlatives become cheap tricks. Shipwrecked
in my armchair, I sip a vodka on the rocks.

Nightime. I read a reference to Byron in Balzac,
and Wilde's pathetic epigram about his life comes back
to mock the agony of third-rate poets' notoriety,
whose genius is in living, not in poetry.
Somewhere towards Holland Park a bell sounds one.
It seems a warning bouy in some Greek sea: alone
and floundering in Missolonghi, the last illusion gone,
the deathsweat both a bedroom farce and classical Greek tragedy.
I swim to bed to thrash towards a receding shore.
Nightime and ocean. There is no more.

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JONAH'S POEMS

I. Inside Out

Smelling the finger of God in every rotten hallway,
our crazy Jonah vomits by the wet red blobs
of butcher stalls, a landlubber with ulcers,
seasick with the memory of obscene miracles:
ambergris, blubber and cunt.
Our children follow him about, tease him
into fish tales, dare him to look down their mouths.
We citizens of Nineveh tolerate the harmless touched,
let him wave his crusty arms on market day
lest enemies accuse us of impiety,
but not on holy days or when our army marches
through the squares — then we naturally contain him;
those ocean eyes and seaweed hair do nothing
for morale. The priests see him a traitor,
but we liberals can't spy a revolution
in his incoherent sermons — just a peaceful madman
drowned between a selfish God and a Leviathan.

II. And Jonah said

"Dig up the dead. Women in the streets, the stink.
the demagogues and Jesus in the bloodstream,
and I accept all offerings Ged Bless You Sir.
Never mind about entrails of big fish;
we roast the skins of our unborn
then talk of the Will of God:
don't make me laugh!
I tell you — piss on wise men;
our children fingerless and blind
while they philosophize to fit the cripples

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in their crippled 'systems' . . . What?
The fish again? what was it like?
Crawl up your old lady's twat,
slosh around in there three days —
that's what it was like.
What did I eat? The boy here
wants to know what I ate, inside.
I ate what you eat, I ate what I could get.
Dig up your dead, I tell you,
stand them up in ranks around your squares,
twist their hands in stiff salutes
and when you're angry hit them
and get on with it, and when you're hungry
eat them and get on with it. The stink,
the stink . . . I'm not too well,
I know I had something to tell you,
but bless me I've been up the arsehole
of God. Praise God, pity an old man."

III. Prophetic Hindsight

The manufactured Bernadettes and sudden cures
prove equally miraculous at plastic Lourdes;
God's bloated body in the lime-and-lemon
slime of troughs frescoed with rainbows of sores.
Even the skeptical reflection helps;
a mottled mirror of naivete, another act of faith.
After the bus tours of pilgrims are said and done,
when nothing remains but the payments,
nothing happens but the faces of the prophets,
birthmarked, blotched, raving to themselves
at windy corners, picking problems like a crusty scab,
searching for our ambergris malignancy,
the holy spermy tumor fueling our auto da fe,
while we while away the time inside a whale.

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THE WEATHERVANE AND THE PENDULUM: PART II

Leo Bersani

In his comments on the essays by Peter Brooks and myself in the last issue of *PR,* William Phillips finds us guilty of "a suspension of what is normally considered to be political thinking." I welcome the discussion, but I find the charge more puzzling than damning.

The context in which Mr. Phillips uses the expressions "political thinking," "political center" and "political identity" gives to these words a precise content: they would apparently consist in more stringent criticisms of the militant Left. Mr. Phillips is right in speaking of "conflicts" in my feelings about Hoffman and Rubin, but do conflicts disqualify thinking from being political? I am, at any rate, far from recommending that we "dissolve" ourselves "in some ideal radicalism, found mostly in youth," and I had hoped to emphasize that if criticism continues to have any function at all, it must clearly refuse a mindless identification with *any* rapturously embattled cause. It seems to me unjust to call my criticism of the most militant Left "minor" when I speak, toward the end of my piece, of the tragically ahistorical dream of those who would bomb us into a community of love.

Nonetheless, Mr. Phillips is of course right about where the emphases fall in my essay, and indeed he makes me see more clearly than before how I feel about *priorities* in current political discussion and behavior. The stupidity of politically ineffectual violence on the Left is that it diverts the energies of the nonviolent Left away from what I take to be its primary task of opposition to established inefficiency, obscurantism and brutality. It redirects those energies to attacks against the rare if indefensible brutality of isolated, politically desperate extremists. How will you distribute your political energies? I can imagine no decent or effective consequences in America from the shooting of policemen or the bombing of buildings. But if we even begin to suggest that the violence which has been perpetrated within the United States by the Left has been a threat to our society comparable either to the violence we have committed in Southeast Asia or to the murder and persecution of Blacks in America, then we should, at the very least, be willing to see our complicity with the Republican Party's order of priorities in last fall's electoral campaign.

In periods of relative stability, "political identity" can be the same thing as political affiliation. We are understandably nostalgic for such comfortable equivalences. But many of us are now without affiliation. Affiliations simplify commitments — both intellectually and morally — and they also are the necessary condition for effective political action. What are our chances now for translating commitments into affilia-

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tions? The mild resurgence of life which liberal thought has recently given signs of is not due to any effective political grouping in opposition to a nonliberal government. Rather, the liberal position has been partially reactivated thanks to the violent repudiation of that position by more radical politics on the Left. But is opposition to radical opposition a viable new life for liberalism? It is tempting, if not to think so, at least to act as if that were the case. Thus, in what is perhaps a sad epilogue to its history, liberalism as protest tends to be replaced by liberalism setting the "legitimate" moral limits of protest.

I of course feel that the first necessity, now, is to organize protest effectively and sanely. Militant radicalism has not consisted only in the planting of bombs, and to refuse to discriminate between the Weathermen and the Panthers, or even between a yippie love-in and a yippie enactment of a Ronald Reagan scenario, may be to retreat into politics–as–usual. If we think that politics-as-usual will suffice to change what we want to see changed, we should say so and also say what makes us so optimistic. If we no longer feel this, we can stop wasting precious time: the Administration, the FBI and the police will continue to keep us on the alert for the dangers of radical violence, and the rest of us might show more awareness of the fact that recent militancy has not been limited to haphazard violence, and that today's fragmented forms of radical protest contain *some* styles and strategies which can be exploited and refined by less fragmented, more reasoned programs of radical protest.

One final word about literary criticism and politics. I certainly don't want to "substitute" the former for the latter. Even if I did want that, it would, as I argue in my essay, be impossible: literary criticism implies political choices just as infallibly as political behavior employs strategies of imaginative persuasion and is therefore liable to analyses analogous to those used in literary criticism. Each of us is always a mysterious compound of passion and analysis. (Poetic condensation obscures the analytical; the discursiveness of criticism can both disguise and tame the passion.) Analysis and criticism are activities of life; there is an *application* of criticism which may be called literary criticism and another which may be called political criticism. To recognize in the latter procedures familiar to discussions of literature is neither to "overvalue" literature nor to "undervalue" politics. All the texts of our experience are open to explication, and the healthy function of critical analysis is to understand, appreciate and judge the structures of passionate intention which all behavior — in extremely diversified ways — both proposes and conceals.

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PETER BROOKS

William Phillips's comments on my article in the last *PR* constitute an exercise in persistent misreading. Far from assuming "that Hoffman and Rubin and the Panthers . . . represent in some absolute, unquestionable way *'The Revolution,'*" I tried to probe whether the term revolution could in fact mean anything to us in America, 1970, whether it was conceivable other than as a cultural gesture (Rubin), or as an authentic but alien political stance beckoning to us but finally excluding us (The Panthers). Phillips wants to see me as the apologist of current radical styles, whereas I was seeking new forms adequate to new and baffling situations. He would have it that I regard violence as "a matter of essence" and "a genre of permanent radical activity," while I in fact attempted to test the meaning, and danger, of violence as a political gesture in a society so deeply permeated with physical and psychological violence. He maintains that I accept Panther doctrine at face value since I claim that the "real issue" had nothing to do with the guilt or innocence of the New Haven Nine. What I quite clearly meant by the "real issue" in the passage in question was what Yale had to deal with: its relations to the Blacks within the university and in New Haven. I wasn't appealing to higher forms of immanent justice, or revolutionary strategy; I wasn't sitting in judgment on the trial and I don't know why Phillips would have me do so. As for "taking sides, as though there were only two": I tried to make it clear that in some contexts — where the polarization was simple and the enemy clear — one could and had to take sides, whereas in other (and larger) contexts it wasn't possible, or wasn't yet possible, to do so. And Phillips surely must understand that when polarization has really taken place, there *are* only two sides.

If I mention Phillips's misreadings, it is not simply because they are in themselves serious distortions; they also point to what I think is a widespread failure to bring mental and imaginative energy to the discussion of political events and issues. He accuses me of "a suspension of what is normally considered to be political thinking." When I connect this reproach to Phillips's problems in *reading* my text, I am forced to conclude that for him "political thinking" means simply the ritual repetition of the old categories and concepts of American politics, be they electoral, Marxist, Trotskyist. In his objections to my "esoteric" language, to my "substituting literary criticism for politics," what he is suggesting is that "politics" is a separate realm that must be dealt with in a separate language. Behind his argument for the usual language of politics, Phillips is really, if unwittingly, arguing for politics as usual. That so sensitive a man and thinker should do so is an indication of our political despair, our inability to find new forms — and the metaphors that precede the construction of new forms — to handle, or even to talk about, the realities of our political situation. So to pre-assume the nature of politics, to assign it to a special realm of activity and language, is to remain in futile disconnectedness, and to assure that the political will never be rebuilt on

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the basis of true human concerns and values. It seems to me imperative that we bring to political debate — as to all our reflections on reality — the best critical languages we possess, or can invent; and that our whole sensibilities be engaged where our lives are. I was in my article trying to understand, to interpret, what to many seemed sheer and ominous chaos. If Phillips chooses to see such an attempt as playing the "weathervane," so be it; but surely we need some instruments (and I hope mine were closer to the more analytical variety) to know what the vectors of our political atmosphere are. If we abandon the effort to understand the world — and to understand consciousness in the process of reflecting on the world — how shall we ever change it?

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

It is too bad both Bersani and Brooks are out to score points, mostly textual ones, rather than to come to grips with the issues.

They manuever themselves to the side of good (meaning new) politics and those who question their positions to the side of bad (meaning old) politics, which, so far as I can make out, is a grab bag of liberalism, Marxism, Trotskyism, electoral politics, "politics-as-usual"— all presumably the exclusive property of the past. Bersani and Brooks remind us of the evils of society, and the virtues of those who would remedy them, as though this was what is in question. They are not, they say, for everything that's new on the Left, though it is not clear where they draw the line. There is also a good deal of fancy footwork about language and literature and politics, which I do not understand. Nor can I comprehend their unwillingness to recognize that, as Hegel observed, all things may be related but they are also distinct.

What is the question I raised? I thought I'd made clear that it was one of political identity. If not, let me be blunt. Are Brooks and Bersani radicals or liberals? What do they really believe about such basic questions as the nature of the existing system, the possibility of reforming it, the viability of revolutionary activity in the U.S. today? Do they agree with the politics of the Panthers, the Weathermen, Castro, Dubcek—of the various Marxist movements in the rest of the world? On the issue of tactics, which has a long and complex history, which tactics do they accept, and which do they reject? Or do they simply favor, as their writing seems to suggest, anything militant and youthful, so long as it isn't *too* nutty?

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It is frivolous to evade the issues by immersing oneself in an atmosphere of radicalism and assuming they are being taken care of by the cultural revolution. Brooks's rationale for not confronting these questions is that we need "to find new forms—to handle, or even to talk about, the realities of our political situation." But to put one's emphasis entirely on the novelty of the current situation, as both Brooks and Bersani do, is to exempt oneself from having to think about political standards, since political acts are converted into happenings, which can be judged only by literary criteria. We do face new problems today. But is the situation entirely unique? Do none of the traditions of radicalism or liberalism apply? And if some do, then which ones and how? Blurring these questions means that anything calling itself revolutionary is taken to be revolutionary. It also permits liberals to masquerade as revolutionaries, and vice versa.

In short, the reason for all the ambiguity and misunderstanding is that Bersani and Brooks, like so many people of good will and intelligence today, stand somewhere between liberalism and radicalism, having the best of both worlds, flirting with revolution, but not going all the way, and indulging in the fashionable putdown of liberalism, without giving up its intellectual comforts. They are very much like academic critics who do not have positions of their own but are sympathetic to the vibrations of anything new. Thus they cover up essentially conventional attitudes with an air of up-to-dateness.

In literature one can live with it. But in politics playing at revolution—which is what having it both ways amounts to—can be dangerous, for it frightens the Right with the illusion of strength on the Left.

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ARGUMENTS

WHY JOHNNY CAN'T

It would be almost comforting to believe that the failures of American education were the result of failures of imagination and were to be cured by a rich application of imagination to its ills. And this volume suggests something of what imagination, free from bureaucratic limitations and traditional assumptions, might do.[1] But it also describes, by implication, a system of education so hardened into bureaucracy and tradition that, for a large proportion of its students, it serves more as a penal system than as a way to learning. The imagination needed for important change is manifest here, but the power to let it loose is not. Imagination means risk and some obvious waste; it constitutes a threat to the way things are and to the people who keep them that way. And there is little evidence that it will be tolerated. American education is simply too big to take chances.

The seriousness of the problems is only now becoming clear to many people outside that cluster of radical critics, like Paul Goodman and Edgar Friedenberg, who have been reminding us for years that things are not as they should be and that the restructuring of American education must be radical. Until very recent years, most of us who have been dissatisfied with American education have confined our complaints to cocktail parties, to expressions of contempt for colleges of education, to occasional confrontations with simpleminded teachers or with rigidly unintelligent bureaucrats administering rigidly unintelligent curricula and jargon devised "experiments."

It has taken clear and bitter manifestations of the social implications of our entire educational system to make us aware that we have been quietly complicit in what amounts to a conspiracy against our children. The message has leaked up to us slowly. A decade ago, critics were directing much of their energy to ending the hypocritical and vicious "separate but equal" system in the South; Sputnik helped us

1 *Radical School Reform.* Ed. by Ronald and Beatrice Gross. Simon and Schuster. $7.95.

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energize other kinds of reform in education — the tightening up of curricula, the development of comprehensive schools; eventually Vietnam made us aware that the educational system was producing cannon-fodder among the poor, college deferments among the middle class; and this forced us to face the de facto separate and unequal system in the North; finally, the close look entailed by these discoveries made us aware that public education was failing almost every possible test.

The first four documents collected in this volume — chapters from books by Herndon, Kozol, Holt and Jules Henry — will be familiar to many readers seriously concerned with the problems of education in America. But taken together they make even more evident the subtle ways in which methods of teaching are allied to political and social strategies, the great risk involved in attempting to break out of the conventions institutionally assumed to represent realities, and the futility of expecting serious changes through the work of individual and imaginative teachers. The fierceness and precision of such reports as are gathered here can only intensify our rather luxurious feelings of guilt unless they are accompanied by systematic attempts to change the structure of things as they are. Some of our young have instinctively learned this, to the confusion and disgust of the generation that expected gratitude rather than contempt.

They learned it partly because of what they did not learn while in school. My own very middle-class son, excited at five years old at the way words could record experience, finally gave up an early habit of keeping a notebook full of reflections when his teacher kept insisting that his "h's" were crooked. He is learning now what millions of kids have already learned: the irrelevance of learning to all but the narrowest aspects of his life, the distinction between knowledge and experience, the unreality of the values explicitly announced in classroom and textbooks, the dangers of self-expression, the finality of power. At some point he will discover what many of the noisiest college students in America have already discovered, that American education can be used to thwart the talents and powers they might most usefully be encouraged to develop. Perhaps, in the long run, these are good lessons, but only if they make our students sufficiently angry to try to do something about it.

Jules Henry describes, in the chapter here, schools and classrooms where education serves only "to prevent the truly creative intellect from getting out of hand," and where regulations and traditions and simple human indifference protect frightened teachers from the responsibility of touching the lives of their students (or from being touched by them). Herndon describes a classroom in which the students' positive genius (of a kind) was distorted into brilliant techniques of disruption and

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evasion — short-term survival and long-term sucide. The activities Henry and Herndon describe are, in fact, recognizable outside the classroom.

The schools are our society in small. The radical American experiment of educating everybody, like the radical American experiment of government of, for and by the people, seems to be swerving toward a bureaucracy which in order to operate efficiently and democratically is forced, too often, to defend itself against the very people it was presumably intended to serve. The happy American classrooms of elementary schools are among the most conservative institutions in the country, and the teacher frequently adopts the role — largely in self-defense — of making control rather than release of energy his main function. That energy, we see, does not in the long run stay controlled. Indeed, one wonders why the current explosions have been so long in coming, why the political rhetoric of "up yours" and "kill the pig," the antiintellectualism of our brightest young, the uproar at Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the revolutionary energies of adolescence, had not long ago been directed at our schools. From their earliest school days, students hear the rhetoric of the American revolution in a context utterly alien to that rhetoric. If Black they are penalized for not talking and writing the language of the classes which repress them; if white they learn the strategies of "civilized" competition while ostensibly studying the facts and skills which, graduation speeches will tell them, are to make them "the future leaders of America." They learn quite well what that leadership consists of.

This volume does not even touch upon the most immediate practical problem: how to make it possible for imagination and intelligence importantly to effect American education. And because it confines itself to considerations of the imagination and intelligence (outside the seats of power) it can be illusorily cheering. In some instances, imagination and sensibility seem to have made their mark, to have diverted some students from the disillusion with education and with the ideals of freedom that turn too many of them, eventually, into cynicism or rebellion. And it is worth looking at how that can be done. The volume claims only that radical reform is necessary and possible; it does not provide a program for its accomplishment. While we await full-scale change, seriously engaged teachers persist in struggling to save their students from the system in which they are all entrapped. They put their feelings and their very selves on the line, frequently meeting even more profound discouragement from the students than from established powers. But they recognize that in any given classroom the system is always secondary to the teacher and that a good teacher can do much to keep even the worst of systems from doing its damage.

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The classroom is a very private place for the teacher. In public schools, to be sure, the teacher's day is apparently regulated by lesson plans and school-wide policies, but in fact the moment-to-moment experience within a classroom poses, unremittingly, a test of self and, for many, a threat to it; it entails, moreover, a very special relationship between student and teacher which no lesson plan can long avert. Probably for this reason, the essays by teachers in this volume are usually deeply personal and, therefore, convincing, with an almost self-conscious refusal to adopt the bureaucratic and pseudoscientific language of most colleges of education. They see the classroom as a place where children and teacher interact in altogether personal and human ways, and if they tend toward autobiography it is because they see no discontinuity between the work of a teacher and his quality as a human being.

The strength of the excerpt from Herndon's book, for example, depends upon his alertness to his own uncertainties and needs and to his students' altogether unspoken desires to be recognized as people. He comprehends their behavior in human terms and rejects his colleague's description of all the students as "The Tribe." Or rather, once having introduced the term, he uses it ironically to help him locate the shared characteristics of his students in order to understand their very personal idiosyncrasies. Herndon doesn't put himself in the forefront, but he is there, speculating, worrying, unsentimentally seeing what the students are up to. What does it feel like to have paper handed out one sheet at a time? What does it feel like not to know how to read in the seventh grade? What does it feel like to make fun of one's own racial characteristics? Herndon soon discovered that the students were not, as he feared, belittling themselves and performing as they did simply for his benefit: "If I had imagined that the students of GW would present a united front on the question of their own (relative) blackness, it was a mistake. If I had supposed they were concerned with testing me, that was a mistake too. They weren't interested in degrees of liberal white attitudes like they spozed to be." Nothing profound here, nor in the rest of Herndon's discoveries about his students and about the educational system in which they fail to learn. Only the willingness and energy to make discoveries, to respond to the peculiar qualities of his class.

Kozol and Kohl record, similarly, their own uncertainties, the test of the classroom, their deepening relations with students and — as with Herndon — the retaliation against their humanizing tactics by the school systems in which they worked. In the Boston School Committee Report which justified the dismissal of Kozol from his teaching position, Kozol is commended for his imagination, initiative and enthusiasm. But be-

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cause he insisted on working outside of the prescribed reading list, in particular on using Langston Hughes's poem, "Ballad of a Landlord," he had to be dismissed: "Obviously," the report notes, "a measure of control over the course of study is essential to protect the 94,000 Boston school children from ideologies and concepts not acceptable to our way of life." Apparently only the institution can be ideologized and the classroom can't even put other ideologies to a test.

But Kozol was not concerned with ideology or with testing the institution's ideology. He was trying to respond to the interests and concerns of the students who happened to be in his class; like many other contributors to this volume, he sees the teacher's responsibility precisely in the attempt to respond to the uniqueness of each of his students. But there are, of course, alernative views which would regard this notion of the teacher's responsibility as sentimental. The essay by Marshall McLuhan and George Leonard, for example, while ostensibly arguing for "custom" teaching, actually argues for the dissolution of the relationship between teacher and student. There will be a new free electronic environment where the student learns but nobody teaches. Somehow, if our schools keep changing fast enough, with the introduction of the almost infinite possibilities of electronic equipment, we'll be all right. The faith in machinery and the ultimate implausibility of the vision this creates can, perhaps, be adequately demonstrated by one sentence in the essay: "Even today, most U.S. automobiles are in a sense, custom produced. Figuring all possible combinations of styles, options and colors available on a certain new family sports car, for example, a computer expert came up with 25 *million* different versions of it for a buyer." Call in the expert, but don't bother looking at the cars. This kind of nonsense obviously fails to cope with the nature of the people who sell and the people who buy, the way the materials are produced, the way demand is created, and the real nature of the variations among the different cars. Technology might be put to some of the uses McLuhan imagines. But let the uses be humanly determined. McLuhan's curious insensitivity to human perversity, anxiety and complication invalidates much of his argument.

There is an academically conservative argument that makes for a far more effective attack on the view that the schools must be responsive to each student's uniqueness. It begins with the assumption that there are subject matters to be learned and that these are what they are regardless of who studies them. This assumption places the teacher in a strictly professional role. He teaches and judges exclusively in terms of success in mastering material. This role has been muddied by a

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fuzzy sentimentalism that has, in the post–World-War-II years, accompanied the teaching of togetherness and social adaptability. But there really isn't much difference, for the teacher, between teaching correct grammar or "correct" deportment. In both cases, the emphasis is on what is socially acceptable. As many of the critics in this volume point out, the effect of such teaching is to instill the notion of competition in students, to orient them toward grades and public marks of success and, curiously, to minimize for them the value of the very knowledge they struggle to acquire. Students taught in this professional way frequently discover that knowledge has nothing to do with anything that matters to them or to their teachers and parents. The teacher, nevertheless, teaches his subject, and the student, more or less successfully, masters it.

Education, then, is the providing of information, and a usual concommitant of this view is that the successful accumulation of information depends on certain largely innate skills. Jensen's recent study of Black I.Q. scores is only the most obvious and respectable attempt to avoid the implication of the fact that academic success seems to have a high correlation with certain social conditions in the students' backgrounds. And these attitudes have much to do with the way in which the word "standards" is regularly invoked by the most high-minded, as well as by the most frightened, and the most reactionary academics in order to avoid change. Shifting the perspective from subject matter to student, seeing education as a way of acquiring skills useful in dealing with the world in all its aspects, attempting to reach large numbers of Blacks and minority students who have no reason to respect academic authority — all this poses a deep threat to the institutionalized form of American education. The threat to standards is a threat to an entire system of values, most of which have, in fact, little to do with academic mastery of materials. It is difficult for most academics to imagine that an institution with a large Black population can be doing serious educational work.

To say that critics represented in this volume are not concerned with standards is not to say that they are unconcerned about whether their students acquire skills and knowledge. They see knowledge pragmatically and have a deep respect for their students. The student, for them, is not a little vessel to be filled brimming with information but a potentially perceptive and sensitive human being whose life in school is continuous with his life outside and who can learn to learn most effectively by seeing some value in knowledge, some connection between it and his life and some human responsiveness, flexibility and respect in the people appointed to teach him. The cost to teachers who think

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this way is enormous. The personal test of the classroom is more intense for them than for most teachers because it cannot be passed by playing games within the rules established by their institutions. Rather, they are forced to lay themselves open to the threats posed by all the other demanding egos in the classroom; they have to earn their respect and trust.

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Yet it is the very nature of institutions to prevent the teacher from risking such exposure. Traditionally, a teacher has commanded respect and attention by virtue of the authority vested in him by the institution. He could assume that the student would adhere to the rules of learning and behavior established by the institution. Working within the institution is comfortable for both teacher and student, even when the student resists its pressures. Anyone who has tried to teach in a situation where none of the normal assumptions about the relationship between teacher and student are in operation will understand the desire to get back to the old protections. Even students are made uneasy and distrustful when they are freed from institutional regulations. It becomes difficult for them to focus their angers or direct their energies when the ordinary pressures of authority, deadlines, grades, examinations and universally applicable strictures are gone. The institution protects its workers and, simultaneously, protects itself. When a teacher exposes himself to the dangers of freedom, he also exposes the institution; any willingness to break down conventions must seem a direct threat to the white educational structure. If, for example, the Boston Public Schools cannot fairly assert "a measure of control over the course of study" within each classroom, then the Boston Public Schools will tend to lose their authority in other areas — in curriculum, reading lists, placement of personnel, even in teaching of ideology. The institution will become open and decentralized, inconsistent and subject to the vagaries of each of its members.

And that, of course, is at the center of the difficulties of American education. It isn't even a matter of whether the present Boards of Education are bad but of whether any institution is compatible with the proper aim of education. For most of the radical critics represented in this volume, open and decentralized institutions are precisely what are needed. But if open and decentralized, they will have considerable difficulty operating at all, handling the massive problems that come with the commitment to educate everybody. Is it possible to rely on different communities and schools to determine the qualifications necessary for good teachers? Is it possible to attend to the problems of all the students without dissolving into chaos if there are no citywide regulations governing teaching and behavior? Are there enough people around who can do the job without the guidance of the well-trained few in the central office? Who is going to determine what the steps toward proper education are? Is that determination to be left to the idiosyncratic imaginations of individuals? Paul Goodman's answer suggests how far the violation of educational traditions might go in the breaking down of the institution: "We can, I believe, educate the young entirely in terms of

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their free choice, with no processing whatever." Exeunt, Boards of Education. Radical criticism of education will inevitably lead to something like a total rejection of institutionalized education. And, of course, since the present educational system so closely resembles the society in which it exists, such criticism must lead to a radical critique of the society itself. And the society is unlikely to tolerate it.

Goodman's utopianism carries to its extreme the implication of the kind of radical criticism with which this book is concerned. It is ostensibly vulnerable to the kind of objections which reveal the dangers of McLuhan's essay. That is, it projects its rich possibilities without pausing to consider the price of the achievement. Yet Goodman is clearly sensitive, in ways that McLuhan is not, to the human implications of the activities he argues for. His objections to the established system and his proposals for a new way seem to emerge from a genuine sense of the way at least some young people (like Paul Goodman?) feel, of their desires, frustrations, capacities, uncertainties. He has a fine sense of what education might be and of how freedom might operate "With Guidance," he says, "whatever a child experiences is educational." He doesn't, however, talk about who is to do the guiding or about how it can be ensured outside some institution. Here, as elsewhere in the volume, the practical imagination which might work out ways to develop a kind of antiinstitutional institution does not come into play, and the book lapses toward irresponsibility.

The radical criticism here, however positive in intention, tends to be negative, responsive only to the limits of the present way of doing things. American education is, as we know, modeled on a German educational method which was highly selective and upperclass in orientation. Its effect has been to make our universal education a class-oriented one in which the poor or the ethnically alienated are punished not by being kept out of school but by doing so badly within it that they drop out and incur the wrath of the society for their refusing to work at education (or the contempt of society for their inferiority). The requirements imposed by high schools and colleges on all students are meaningful to none but a small minority. These requirements ought not to constitute the core of education, and their elimination must be one of the fundamental steps in the direction of the kind of freedom and richness of possibility that Goodman discusses. Yet when requirements are eliminated — as they have been at some colleges — professionals tend to assume that students will act irresponsibly in choosing the work they will do, unless the institution is well-populated with students who, in effect, have completed those requirements before they come to college. Where

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enrollment is heavily Black, elimination of requirements is frequently taken as further evidence that the institution isn't educationally serious and lacks standards.

Unfortunately, the experience of many teachers — and among them the most well-intentioned and experimental of them — partly confirms such suspicions. Those who attempt to give the students the freedom they seem to want and need frequently are deeply frustrated by the apparent waste of time that follows, by the student's lack of initiative and perversity of direction and by the ingratitude and distrust of students who apparently see freedom not in Goodman's terms but as a particularly pleasant way to goof off and be rewarded. For the teacher in these circumstances, the desire to backlash becomes overwhelming. Not enough of the essays in this book deal with these frustrating realities. Many a young teacher has walked into his first job with his head stuffed with Goodman and Friedenberg, only to be bitterly disappointed by the recalcitrant humanity of his students. But one of the most touching, convincing and salutary essays in this book is a description by Anne Long of her experience at the Vancouver New School, a description which presents an altogether unsentimental and unutopian view of the price of freedom even while refusing to regard the price as too high. The essay suggests something of the distance we all need to travel if we are seriously to revise the educational establishment so as to encourage students to work to develop their talents fully.

Wanting to believe in freedom, Miss Long saw nothing but failure when she arrived at the school. The human outrages and horrors perpetrated by the students would have taxed the strongest believer in freedom. "Student artwork was destroyed, pencils and rulers karate chopped, chairs broken up, desks smashed, sawed in half. The ditto machine became a juvenile pornography and hate literature plant." When Miss Long herself got the opportunity to share the direction of the school, she was determined to do things differently, to bring some kind of order out of the chaos of freedom. She saw that the students themselves were frustrated by their apparently limitless freedom. But the effect of her backlash was to convince her that the artificial imposition of assignments and activities on the students simply reestablished their old wasteful relation to learning. Touchingly, she confesses her uncertainties and finally summarizes the view to which she came, a view which certainly is in accord with Goodman's, but one which is earned because of the particular circumstances through which she had come, circumstances which might — to others — have made the view untenable.

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> Finally, I had to make my peace with myself and acknowledge that I had come to the point in my thinking where I agreed with our ex-director's premise (as I understand it) about children in the educational process, at least those children who have had four or five years of public schooling to work out of their systems. Children just aren't going to get involved with ideas or other people's concerns or feelings until they have sorted out their own identities and egos well enough so that they can move into those other areas without fear of losing themselves . . . I'm very skeptical about those enthusiastic young student teachers who "believe" in free schools, and who come to us to discover our "secret." Maybe our secret is that we haven't found any secret yet and probably never will. Maybe our success is in precisely that area which gives us the most difficulty: the uncertainty, the vagueness. Perhaps our children grow into focus because the function of our school is so ill–defined and their role in it, too, is undefined.

There is a quality of heroism in this capacity to live without definition — a distinctly antiinstitutional heroism. It is particularly valuable in its rejection of formulas and of the facile optimism of the kind that it sometimes encouraged by writers represented in this volume.

Utopian thinking about school reform, without practical experience of the effects of freedom on students unused to it, is inevitably unsatisfying and unimpressive. Yet the main directions implied by most of the essays in this volume are essential if American education is to begin to respond to the needs of all students. Anne Long's educational world evokes my admiration but makes me nervous. I have found by rather bitter experience that Kozol and Kohl's successes cannot be imitated, except, I assume, by teachers who have their rare personal qualities; Goodman's vision is attractive, but it is difficult to imagine how to implement it. But in the face of the current waste in American education, no waste occasioned by radical, decentralizing experiments can be worse or more destructive. We all have too much invested in the immediate acquisition of facts or skills which have, traditionally, been taken as the staple of education. We need to be made aware that even in the most successful classes, a large proportion of the students are not reached, or are reached only superficially so that what they learn cannot possibly remain with them. We need, in particular, to believe in the human reality of children and not to expect of them any serious commitments or activity that we ourselves would find tedious, meaningless or hypocritical. Our teachers need to acquire the nerve to be what Anne Long sees herself as being: "I could simply say that I am an adult whose job it is to help children with whatever tasks they have taken upon themselves. I treat them as I would treat any other person, with consideration and respect."

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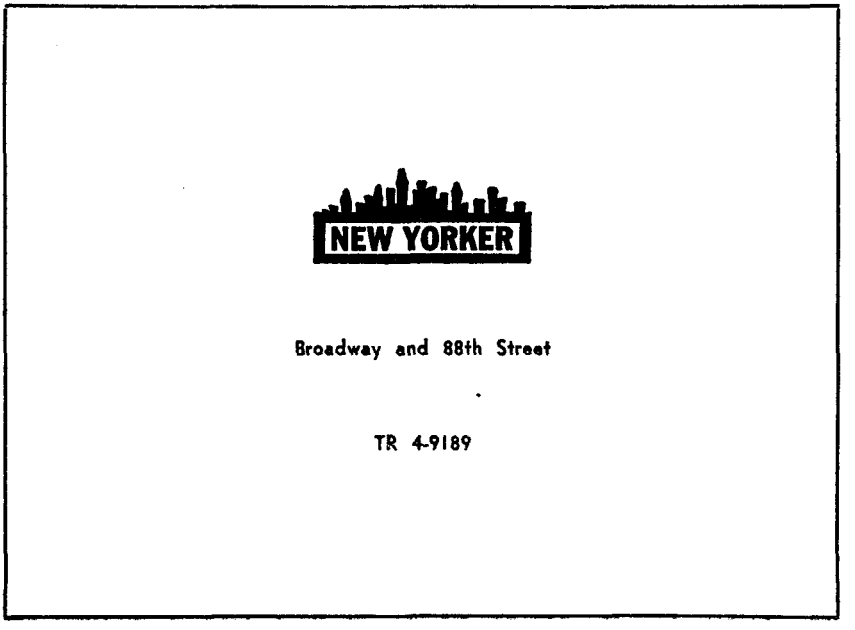
Of course, the American educational system will not stand for this from its teachers. More important, perhaps, many of the most deeply engaged teachers will not stand for it. Such a notion of the teacher's role constitutes a threat to an entire life style, an entire social structure; moreover, it requires extraordinarily sensitive and intelligent and durable teachers. I doubt that there are enough to go around. The imagination of the few, represented here, has to deal with educational institutions which annually deal with millions of students. I confess that I would be frightened by unequivocal and universal willingness to allow the release of so much wildly undisciplined energy. But I fear I have nothing to fear. With so much invested in schools as they are, and with such intensity of engagement required to produce change, it is sadly unlikely that many of these millions of children will benefit from this genuinely imaginative and unfrightened imagination. In the long run only a change in the social system can radically change the educational system. Yet the social changes probably need to be preceded by educational ones. It is all a mess; but if the changes are taking place that will produce a sufficiently liberated generation to make the larger changes without fear, they are being created by people like Anne Long who have no fixed notions of the way it spozed to be and who have the by now un-American quality of being willing to live without certainty.

George Levine



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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

BEIRUT—A Palestinian guerrilla spokesman today described the presence of armed guards on flights of El Al, the Israel airline, as "a gross violation of international law."

Speaking on Damascus radio, he said the failure of a guerrilla attempt to hijack an El Al airliner over the North Sea yesterday was due to this "outrageous Israel violation."

(*The London Times*. September 8, 1970.) Contributed by Anita Van Vactor, London, England.

HOUSTON (AP)—The University of Texas board of regents took steps Friday to stop its spiraling enrollment on the Austin campus by initiating a one-year pilot program.

However, Frank C. Erwin, regents board chairman, said he disapproves of any enrollment policy that limits admission to "A" students.

"I'll never vote for a permanent plan to limit enrollment on the basis of grades only," he said. "If we adopted such a plan then in three or four years we would have nothing but 'A' students at Austin. And we would be in the same position as Berkeley University of California where disturbances have occurred."

(*The El Paso Times,* October 24, 1970.) Contributed by Nancy Wood, El Paso, Texas.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS. (UPI)—A statement from a "woman's revolutionary group" claiming to have bombed Harvard University's Center for International Affairs has been rejected by police officers.

"This was a very sophisticated bomb," a Cambridge police officer said Thursday, describing the device which destroyed a library in the center. "We feel that women wouldn't be capable of making such a bomb."

(*Gloucester Daily Times,* October 16, 1970.) Contributed by the Rev. George Koski, S.T.M., Bronx, N. Y.

ECOLOGISTS SEE TOO MUCH HIKING AS A DANGER TO THE ADIRONDACKS.

(*The New York Times,* November 8, 1970.)

Editors' Note: *We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to* PR *will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.*

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BOOKS

THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

HECKLETOOTH 3. By David Shetzline. Random House. $5.95.

WHEN THE WAR IS OVER. By Stephen Becker. Random House. $5.95.

FAT CITY. By Leonard Gardner. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $5.50.

GOING DOWN. By David Markson. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $5.95.

THE LIFE & LOVES OF MR. JIVEASS NIGGER. By Cecil Brown. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $5.50.

Most of the novels at hand try, really try as one of their central themes (or burdens) to proclaim their relevance, or, as a pretty, vacant co-ed said, "revelance." I have come to like her malapropism for it is a revelation we still want from fiction, an act of the imagination that will illuminate events, not a dutiful touching of the bases when the novelist feels he must get in the game.

Heckletooth 3 by David Shetzline is a case in point: an accomplished writer has unnecessarily cluttered his basic metaphor for American individualism with easy references to the significant world that the reader would better make on his own. The hero of *Heckletooth 3* is a loner in the forest service who shoots an elk out of season to save the lead dog of his pack — and thereby hangs a tale meant to encompass the spectrum of our society. At his worst Shetzline spoils a good thing by being overexplicit. His hero *thinks:*

> Who went down into Texas and took a zillion of Texas oil and still never pays a cent tax? Who's over in Asia messing with everything they can get their hands on?

And then he *says* to the sheriff who still doesn't know he's the culprit who killed out of season:

> "There's been an awful lot of taking in this country, Bobby."

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"True. The point is this elk here. You gotta stop taking somewhere so we're stopping the taking with this elk."

And I got to start taking somewhere so I'm starting with this elk. Not that I meant to kill him, nor would kill him again. *That elk, sir, that elk there has been cowboyed.*

The problems of organized American greed seen against that other sort of spirited taking, the appealing code of the outlaw, the cunning that is part of our strength is quite enough — we do not need Asia. One moral conundrum does not necessarily imply another. The story of butchering the elk and carrying it illegally out of the forest during a forest fire is not enthralling and though it is meant to be the central symbolic action it is literal and drawn out in the telling. Shetzline is not sure of his powers as a storyteller which are considerable and tends to overload his narrative with interlocking lives, many of them no doubt characters interesting to him as foils for his hero or for the sophisticated town doctor, but who carry on like regular guys in *Field and Stream.* The doctor is a sensitive man like those well-educated gentlemen in Faulkner who come closest to the author's sensibility and who carry a sense of history about with them quite naturally. There is a story, in the wings as it were, of an attractive, serious college boy who has worked with the forest service during past summers and is now sought by the FBI fleeing for Canada with a girl, with dope — evading the draft. If only Shetzline could have trusted the resonance of this softly told tale. The epigraph for *Heckletooth 3* is " 'Who stole America?' — Lawrence Ferlinghetti," a question which might have been as facilely handled as the proposition "We blew it," in *Easy Rider,* but which Shetzline at his best really tries to answer.

American individualism in some of its romantic and destructive aspects is also the concern of Stephen Becker in *When the War is Over,* a charming Civil War novel that is much too modest. Perhaps it is the remove of history that gives this work its fine scenario but at the same time imposes a dispassion as though its important moral issues were quaint blue uniforms displayed in a glass case. *When the War is Over* is an artful novel which incorporates a real story, the execution of a southern farm boy as a rebel guerrilla weeks after Lee had surrendered at Appomattox, with the fictionalized account of a skeptical young lieutenant, Marius Catto, who was wounded by the boy, who comes to protect him and who in a stirring finale commands the firing squad: "Thomas! Thomas! You'll be in heaven tonight! Remember that! You'll be in heaven tonight!" The heaven which Catto holds out to the

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boy is not an afterlife, but a gesture in words of love, of a momentary transcendence that belies the damned nature of humanity. Lieutenant Catto knows that he has fashioned his own destiny more than most men and must live with the scaled down unromantic vision.

On the other hand, General Hooker who orders the execution is straight from the familiar high romance of the military:

> His manner . . . as well as his words, told me that his mind was oppressed with the thought that Lincoln's humanity had thwarted his career; that if the general had been permitted to shoot deserters and sleeping sentries when he had the Army of the Potomac, he would have won the war and become a national hero, instead of slipping down the ladder. . . . In some way it is a relief to him to sacrifice this boy.

Bear in mind that the romantic incumbent in the White House saw the movie *Patton* for the second time the night before he decided to go into Cambodia. A frightening fact — and equally frightening is the fact that Stephen Becker's *When the War is Over* is the sort of modulated book that will go virtually unnoticed in these strident times. It would make a wonderful movie, not questionably ironic like *Patton,* but a rich, moving film like Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* which it strongly resembles.

The writing in Leonard Gardner's *Fat City* is excellent but the book never gets beyond its own sphere. Whatever similarities there are between the difficult, defeating world of the small time prizefighter and some larger world are never made available. *Fat City* has the moving detail and accuracy of Dreiser without the scope. Reuben, the fight manager, cynical, passive, pretty much defines the negative action of the novel:

> When Tully wanted to fight again. Reuben believed he would come back to the gym. Until he did, he could only wait. But he did not hope. He had given up on him once already and been disappointed by too many others. As if in rebellion against his influence, they had succumbed to whatever in them was weakest, and often it was nothing he could even define. They lost when they should have won and they drifted away. Over the years he would see one around town. A few he read about in the newspaper — some fighting in other towns for other managers, one killed on a motorcycle, one murdered in New Orleans. They were all so vulnerable, their duration so desperately brief, that all he could do was go on from one to another in quest of that youth who had all that the others lacked.

Gardner's novel is a strange combination of brilliant style and an

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old-fashioned naturalism that lacks energy, seemingly has no place to go. Like the derelict fighters and fruitpickers of Stockton, California that he writes about, he would no doubt deny that there is any place to go. There is a short haunting chapter in *Fat City* in which the men without jobs for the day are moved out of the town square while tree surgeons come in and cut down every blighted tree, leaving the homeless leftover men out in the glare of the sun. The passage has a powerful impact and metaphoric invention that Gardner denies in most of the novel leaving us with a tight deterministic story reminiscent of the thirties and strongly at odds with his splendid style. This oblique description of a young fighter's mother could never have been written by Steinbeck:

> Short, impeded by her flesh, spreading and sagging from fifty years of gravity, hotcakes and pies, she showed on her face an almost constant expectation of mistake and mishap. Earlier in his life he had countered her worried curiosity with shouts of defiance. Now he eluded it with shifting eyes, shrugs and a completely unanimated face. After his first day at the Lido Gym he had taken a bottle of liquid make-up from the accumulation on her dressing table, and with it he hid his bruises from her as he and his sister, who had recently married with no advance warning, had long ago learned to conceal their private lives. As he grew older he had begun to feel that it was no longer his father but he whom she held responsible for a life that seemed to him perfectly natural for a mother. "Why don't you leave if you don't like it," he said to her one day in answer to a complaint encompassing the house, his father, his sister, himself, the entire town; and then her stricken face had filled him with anguish not only for what he had said but for the inconsiderate act of existing.

The revelation is beautiful and precise: it seems obvious that Leonard Gardner's first novel shows great strength, a technical accomplishment that would be first-rate if he would allow himself the larger strokes of some controlling and meaningful ideas.

Another recent novel which fails to exist outside of its own limited circumstance is *Going Down* by David Markson, but unlike *Fat City* it is an outrageously empty book written in a series of pretentious styles — fake Faulkner, fake Hemingway, fake Markson. It is about a crowd of dreary aging dropouts who fortunately for the good old U.S.A. all go to Mexico to carry on their silly lives which cannot possibly have any meaning for us. *Going Down* (hopefully the lending libraries will think it means traveling South of the border) is about a *menage à trois,* two eager women and a diffident stud, who climactically get themselves into positions too impossible even for the dreamlike terms

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of good pornography. Undiluted male fantasy, *Going Down* has Steve Chance (really) as its hero, a surly reluctant lover. The characters in Markson's book do talk like faded Shakespearean actors playing Boucicault. Steve Chance cries out unbelievably to a hostile dog in the street, "Well, the devil. . . . Be cursed instead, then, mendicant fool. . . ." Their muddled but high-toned thoughts constantly invoke Renoir, Vivaldi, Corelli, Judas, Christ, Oedipus, Melville, Sisyphus and Mr. Kurtz, to name but a few. The offense is that this novel is written out of some nether landscape in the writer's world that reveals itself to be empty, like Steve Chance who finds himself to be empty of all but the basest desires. It is a world that should not be tolerated outside of the confines of some passé artists colony.

The Life & Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger is an amazing first novel of serious intent about an expatriate Black. Cecil Brown is a sophisticated man who knows he is writing in a literary tradition. Using the clichés of Wright and Baldwin, he arrives at a point of real honesty: Europe is not a place for the Black man to be free, but just another setup in which Mr. Jiveass Nigger himself can play out his stereotyped role. Balling chicks in Copenhagen is not where the action is after all. At the end of the novel George Washington (Mr. Jiveass), a fine creation, decides to come back to America in the squarest possible fashion:

> George went and made a telephone call to the embassy and told the receptionist that he had no money and wanted to get home and the receptionist said that the embassy could only assist in having him shipped back to America, the fare for which he'd have to pay back later. That's cool, George said, that's very, very cool.

This from one of the most successful con men of all time. *The Life and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger,* as the title implies, is the history of a career, a career that must come to an end. It would please Cecil Brown to know that, like the "frail lady" he envisions in the epilogue to his story turning his "dead cock over with the tip of her Scripto looking for 'meaning,' " I cannot quite say what jive is to save my liberal white ass. It's the put on, the run around or to use a phrase more natural to me — blarney. Indeed, the fibbing, free-wheeling George Washington is very like the Playboy of the Western World. His stories range from a short background of his childhood in the South told with wit and perfection of detail to a wildly funny interpretation of *Comus* ("the whole thing is really about the nigger marrying Miss Ann all over again"), to the line he hands the ladies who are only too happy to believe in him as a Princeton graduate, soulful poet, ungrateful cocksman.

The sex in *Mr. Jiveass* is blown up, part of the fabulous in a world scaled up to the highs of Coltrane and James Brown:

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> "Touch me," Pat said, throwing her hot thighs over him. And then they were fucking on into the night.
>
> "Oh, God," he said, and forgot his responsibility forever. They fucked, they fucked.
>
> "Wait," said the girl, for she was no longer a lady. She then got up on her knees. They fucked, they fucked.

Tall tales these, pornographic fish stories, more jive, excess in a world of excesses that finally do not satisfy. Brown begins where Mailer's "White Negro" leaves off and comes to say, if I may use the tip of my Scripto again, that being hip, being consciously hip is not called for, the world of the swinging outlaw, the brutal stud is no longer viable: "If you're black you don't need to get at anything. You're already there."

I don't think that *Mr. Jiveass* is a Black novel. It's too "revelant" to be so classified, and I think Cecil Brown might agree. In an epilogue that is soaring, poetic — all of that — he laces his ultimate honesty with doubt:

> You think that your acts have been lies because you have been acting like a white hero in some white man's novel. But you need to realize that your creator is not some white man, but a black brother, a nigger, a jiveass very much like yourself. And if you chose to see only blackness, that doesn't mean you're blind; it means only that you are living out of your insides, living out of where you first began.
>
> Ah, even this, in the final analysis, even this is jive. All is jive.

The only time I have really understood jive as a word was at a protest meeting on campus in Santa Barbara when Governor Reagan, after Cambodia and Kent State, closed down the universities and proclaimed that there would be no assemblies. The spokesman for the Blacks said, in a moment of eloquence and solidarity, that they brought down their jive on us in Isla Vista and they brought down their jive on us in this university and we are going to go out and go down and go to Washington and we are going to tell them . . . we're going to say to Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Nixon that they had better get their thing together . . .

If only rhetoric could do it.

Maureen Howard

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CULTURE AND ITS USES

SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER. Vol. I: About Society; Vol. II: About Literature. By Richard Hoggart. Oxford Univ. Press. Vol. I, $6.50. Vol. II, $7.50.

In 1957 Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* impressively helped one see what was at stake in the difficult and uncertain redefining of politics and manners Britain had been attempting in the decade since the war and Labour's coming of age in the general election of 1945. It was not, however, a visibly political book. For Hoggart the transformation in working-class life was mainly a matter of "culture," changes of style — including styles of consciousness — and not of political identity or modes of action; and in this outlook he was supported by his training in disinterest as a literary critic and by his own origins in the working class, which in England (as he notes) has traditionally found little to value or trust in the bourgeois mechanisms of practical politics and civic participation. Through critical analysis of newspapers, books, popular songs and the like, he sought to show how mass media, which of course must continually be *creating* the mass they purport to address, were altering the thinking and behavior of working-class people as he had known them in his youth.

But *The Uses of Literacy* had considerably more force as a personal document, a way of imagining the meaning of Hoggart's own social experience, than as an "objective" analysis of particular cultural phenomena. In 1957 there was no McLuhan, apart from *The Mechanical Bride,* which Hoggart had read but made no direct use of; Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* was yet to come; with some important exceptions like the Leavises and Orwell (writing however from social positions and assumptions distant from Hoggart's own) and Lawrence, who had obviously taught him a lot, the study of popular culture with the instruments of modern literary criticism had not yet burgeoned into the massive enterprise it became in the sixties. *The Uses of Literacy* itself was a major stimulus to that enterprise, but its ways of analyzing the media-environment of working-class people now seem rather improvisational and sketchy. Yet the book has a quality that no sophisticated methodology could have earned, and that quality derives from Hoggart's fully experienced grasp of the conditions and tone of working-class life, his loving skepticism about its own sense of itself and his under-

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standing that even the most sympathetic observers from other classes, like Orwell, had unwittingly sentimentalized its values.

In a way it was bad luck, for us as well as Hoggart, that *The Uses of Literacy* came out when it did, instead of a few years later, when the significance of television was clearer, when a relative affluence had, to an extent undreamable in 1957, filled working-class life with middle-class properties (appliances, cars, houses, bought on the Never-Never plan), when England had become at least nominally the center of a new international life-style whose limits are not those of class or income but simply of how old one is, or wants to be. In *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart glanced at the milkbar, jukebox ambiance of working-class adolescence, but with only a rather sour pity and contempt for its evident airlessness; still, he can't reasonably be blamed for not guessing — who did? — that those seedy epheboi were about to impose their musical, sartorial and linguistic ways on much of the western world, and that the new culture thus created would extraordinarily complicate the questions of class definition and media effect he was contemplating.

Hoggart, however, has had more than a decade in which to catch up, and we now have two volumes of essays, lectures and reviews written (mostly) between 1957 and 1968. Their first effect is depressing. As the dust jackets indicate, Hoggart has in the meantime become a Public Man, Professor at Birmingham and Director of its Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, a Governor of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, now Assistant Director-General of UNESCO — in short, a man somewhat more in demand than was the staff tutor in Adult Education at Hull who wrote *The Uses of Literacy.* I don't mean to mock such success — Hoggart surely deserves it more than most — but the essays on the state of society and culture in *Speaking to Each Other* have frequently the air of having been directed to more or less official occasions that didn't bring his mind and feelings into ample and subtle enough play. *About Society,* the first of the two volumes, feels especially heavy with Hoggart's sense of audiences that needed to start at the beginning; over and over, in a way that precludes hard-thought detail and the most interesting kind of complexity, he fills in The Whole Picture — television in the sixties, higher education in the sixties, government subsidy of the arts in the sixties, all those dreary Important Subjects the British "quality" press is so twitchily addicted to. As a Public Man he must ask large questions, and although it's to his credit that he asks them in hard ways, one does get a little desperate waiting for some *answers,* which never quite arrive. He tells us that the 536 pages of *Speaking to Each Other* represent only about a third of what he's published in the

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last ten years; it's been a busy life for a man who calls himself a slow writer, and no doubt some thinness and repetition was inevitable, but *About Society* is not, on the whole, enlivening reading.

I'm disappointed too by Hoggart's seeming determination to stay pretty aloof from what, at least to an American eye, seems most intriguing about Britain in the sixties. Though it's a cruel thing to suggest about so scrupulous and honorable a writer, and "Off, off, you lendings" is easier said than done, Hoggart does seem in some danger of becoming the captive of his honors and additions, the victim of the respectability that turns so many academics, whatever their social origins and political outlook, all cautious and conservative inside their own professional nests. He is mainly concerned with older, institutionalized concepts of cultural diffusion — BBC vs. ITV, the state of the national press, the expansion of the universities, the psychological effects of advertising and sex-and-violence — and his relation to the new pop culture, insofar as he has one at all, is mostly suspicious and condescending. He seems to think "youth culture" a mere fraud of the media manipulators like the Swinging London stuff, somehow *American* and thus somehow unreal, certainly without the explosive political potential others think they detect in it. While it's just as well to go slow in claiming lasting importance for this culture, still Hoggart's remarks about university students "living out their sense of the virtue of knowledge" in their rebellious styles — the closest he gets to sympathetic interest in that brave new life — sanction those styles only by finding them new versions of the safe old academic pieties. It's an idea one reaches for when Spiro T. Agnew rides into town, and in the long run it may turn out to be true, but those students, in England and elsewhere, don't *think* they're living out a new form of donnishness, and I doubt that such assumptions help to understand them very well.

This is a perhaps small case of what seems to me a large difficulty in Hoggart's situation. He knows intimately what the personal transition from working class to clerisy feels like, the terrible dangers that lurk in either sentimentalizing or rejecting one's origins, the ways in which a stratified social order uses its own tolerance of mobility to justify the status and privilege it means to perpetuate for *someone*. And it's to the immense credit of Hoggart and others like him that success hasn't appeased their sense that something is wrong in British society, in society itself. But that success exacts a price even so. It leads to the assumption that academic disinterest, because it made possible one's own achievement of critical perspective, provides an adequate perspective on any situation now or to come; because it showed the way out of Leeds without making one forget that Leeds was still there, Hoggart (under-

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standably) continues to hope that serious, honest, decent intellectual disinterest is enough for coping with the new. I hope so too, but in *Speaking to Each Other* (a title which fairly exudes serious, honest, decent disinterest) I fear that Hoggart may be imagining the world with metaphors that no longer quite fit it, that in his determined sobriety he has too sternly resisted the apocalyptic leanings he confesses he sometimes feels, that good sense, even in Britain, may be nearer the end of its tether than he or anyone wants to suppose.

Still one does what one can, and while we still can speak to each other, it's good to have someone like Hoggart doing so. The essays in *About Literature* are on the whole more readable than those in *About Society;* Hoggart is not an innovative or showy literary critic, but he sees what he sees clearly, as in the fine essays on Graham Greene, Orwell and the uses of "tone" in autobiography. But the best things in the two volumes are the reminiscences of Hoggart's childhood and of the teaching of Bonamy Dobrée, which when added to the personal passages in *The Uses of Literacy* make up a scattered but absorbing personal history that is also a history of what may be the most important social development in Britain since the advent of Methodism: the entrance of working-class consciousness into the last sanctuary of privilege, the intellectual and cultural aristocracy of the nation. I do think that Hoggart's work is more successful as representative history than as particular cultural analysis — why won't he see his career and (say) the Beatles' as having, objectively, something important in common? But his life and writings quietly dramatize a crucial area of British experience in our time, and one is willing to be bored occasionally in order to see what that is.

Thomas R. Edwards

ELIOT IN PERSPECTIVE:

A Symposium

Edited by Graham Martin

Including essays by F. W. Bateson, Harold F. Brooks, Donald Davie, Ian Gregor and Richard Wollheim

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THE ORDER OF THINGS

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE. By Gabriel García Márquez. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. Harper & Row. $7.95.

THE SOUND OF THE MOUNTAIN. By Yasunari Kawabata. Trans. Edward Seidensticker. Alfred Knopf. $6.95.

LOCAL ANAESTHETIC. By Günter Grass. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Harcourt, Brace & World. $6.95.

These three splendid works are considered together — in part fortuitously, because they have all become international celebrities this year — but in part because they all have immense designs upon the universe, because they confer its entire meaning upon Nietzsche's reflection: *Everything that ever was is a fragment and a riddle, until the creative will adds: but I wanted it to be that way!*

Written in the fifties, when García Márquez was still in his twenties, two of this Colombian expatriate's short works were published here two years ago as a book of short stories: *No One Writes to the Colonel.* Very much colored, where they are not stained, by Hemingway, there is some other intimation beyond economy, beyond toughness, about these tropicalities, some hope of wholeness suggested by a single imaginary site, by characters referred to if not brought onstage, who participate in the minds of all the others, by a shared history which is meaningful and can speak. *Tout lieu pensé par un homme,* Roland Barthes writes, *est une forme:* thus Márquez refers from the first to an original city which he calls Macondo, and to its inhabitants since the origin, by which he devises — from Sir Francis Drake and some Duke of Marlborough or other to a sports biplane and the banana exploitation — the form of his fiction, as Joyce and Singer, exiles from home like himself, and as Jouhandeau and Faulkner, exiles from everything else, invented theirs: imaginary towns with real men living in them.

After five years of silence during which he read Kafka and Virginia Woolf in Parisian penury, during which he wrote film scripts in Mexico and newspaper articles in Venezuela, and during which, indeed, Faulkner released him into his vocation ("when I first read Faulkner, I thought: I must become a writer"), Márquez wrote *Cien Años de Soledad* which was published (in Buenos Aires) in 1967 and which has become a great international success of esteem and even, we are told, of

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readership. A mystery, always, the true number of readers such books — difficult, lyrical, alien — may have beyond the coffee table and the cover of the *Times*. For there is a resisting vegetable immobility about the narrative, a kind of jungle hypertrophy of character and event which I suspect — my suspicion founded on conversation with those who have actually ventured into the book at all — discourages finishing it, seeing what Márquez is up to, or out for, beyond a six-generation chronicle preceded by a genealogical tree from the hands of the publishers (admirable Forsyte!).

There are cunning references to Fuentes, to Borges, to Cortázar and to Asturias secreted along the way, indeed at every turn there is a nudge, a beck to remind us that "the history of a family is a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spilling into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle." Yet for all its regionalisms and poetical pieties, this book is no more a piece of hallucinated reportage than it is a family epic; the town and the family which founds and then finishes off that town are represented, are shaded in, only to be canceled out by an opposing energy, a "view of life entirely inimical to the credibility and even the structure of narrative (that is why it is so difficult to get to the end of this book where we discover that it is already completed, as a story, before it has ever happened). This view of life, this philosophy, this vision — for that is what it is, a reverie of the body, what Yeats called the dreaming of the bones, best defined by the discovery that the word "myth" and the word "epic" both "mean," etymologically, "word" — is so preposterous that it must be ballasted by all the proleptic details in the chronicler's armory:

> The banana company's city which Patricia Brown may have tried to evoke for her grandchildren during the nights of intolerance and dill pickles in Prattville, Alabama, was a plain of wild grass. The ancient priest who had taken Father Ángel's place and whose name no one had bothered to find out awaited God's mercy stretched out casually in a hammock, tortured by arthritis and the insomnia of doubt while the lizards and rats fought over the inheritance of the nearby church. In that Macondo forgotten even by the birds, where the dust and the heat had become so strong that it was difficult to breathe, secluded by solitude and love and by the solitude of love in a house where it was almost impossible to sleep because of the noise of the red ants, Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula were the only happy beings and the most happy on the face of the earth.

For García Márquez's outrageous *propos*, his vision which is determined to undermine the very texture he has so closely woven of consequential

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detail, of memorable articulation, is the undertaking of apocalypse, the enterprise which holds that all reality — all that has ever happened or will happen — is contained by, is the contents of, an infinite and eternal human body, the body of each of us, and that at certain moments, the moment of love, the moment of death, moments to which nothing is ulterior — at such moments, one hundred years of solitude are realized out of time. As each character in this visionary recital discovers, whether surviving to 115 like Úrsula Buendía or dying at 20 like the last Aureliano, truth "occurs not in the order of man's conventional time, but concentrates a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexist in one instant." The book's four hundred pages exist, a magnificent supererogation, to enforce upon us the knowledge that in its last moment the whole of life will last only a moment.

* * *

Strung out like a *haiku*-sequence between a failure of memory on the first page and a failure of hearing on the last, *The Sound of the Mountain* is composed of so many succinct enclosures, so many partitions and separations, that it abjures whatever ongoing energy might drag its events to a conclusion: things do not come together and have an ending, they disintegrate and recommence. This account of the failure of a family takes place — no, even that phrase is too transitive, too *aimed* to indulge what happens, or what fails to happen, in Kamakura, a mainline suburb of Tokyo within something less than a year. The Ogatas, a saturated family molecule — Shingo and his wife in their sixties, their son and daughter-in-law who live with them and the son's mistress who does not, their daughter estranged from her husband and beset with two daughters of her own — find themselves by circumstance and inertia (World War II is very much a trauma, evoked, glorified, blamed, in any case accredited) obliged for the time to live together. There is some money, not much good will or fun, and no love: divorce and abortion and suicide become matters of course, ceremonies of the quotidian upon which to brood, not events of moral persuasion, for the very events they abrogate — wedlock and procreation and mortality — are secularized, reduced to the manipulative level of aesthetic arrangements in a society without trust in its own traditions, without the sanctions of . . . sanctity.

It is no accident, indeed it is a matter of structural significance, that Kawabata's novel (his first to be published here since he won the Nobel Prize in 1968, it was published in 1954 in Japan) takes, then, as we might say a dye takes, or a glue, and mean it undertakes to work, during just the period when Japan adopted the Western style of reckoning the age of its citizens: from birth, not from conception. The legalism

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dramatizes the discovery, made by everyone in this book, that he is separate, not integral; alone, not united. As in his other three books published in the United States, Kawabata celebrates — though that is too emphatic a verb for his fictions; let me say he gratefully concedes — the opacity of other people, an opacity invincible though yearned against, convulsively opposed:

> It was not perhaps remarkable that his secretary should be acquainted with the woman [his son's mistress] when his own family was not; but Shingo found that fact hard to accept. It was particularly hard to accept when he had Eiko here before him. One knew she was a person of no consequence, and yet on such occasions she seemed to hang heavily before him, like the curtain of life itself. He could not guess what was passing through her mind.

We exist, Kawabata's novel makes clear, from the instant we are sundered from our mother, not from the instant we are engendered within her. We are not members of one another, but dismembered: we may speak, there will be interferences, contaminations; oblique, sedate conversations which undercut the expected end. Suddenly we are face to face, or rather, naked before each other, when we had anticipated no more than a handshake, a bow. But we must suffer the consequence of utterance when we do so, the consequence of merely articulating Swinburne's terrible truth which is the schematic core of this poetic fiction, this pathetic fallacy: *marriage, death and division make barren our lives.*

Entirely seen by Shingo's presbyopic eyes, heard or rather overheard by his otosclerotic ears, the people and passions of the novel are defined by a faulty receiving apparatus, for Shingo has his own wars to wage against decrepitude. Like Umberto D in DeSica's brave film, he is not helped on by humor but by will and by a kind of artistic curiosity about his own defections from grace. As his friends and contemporaries drop off, victims of cancer, a coronary in the arms of a cooperative geisha, suicide and madness, and plagued by a family life in which privacy is to be achieved only by internal exile, emotional mutism, one solace is left, and it is the surprising success of this grim life lived against the background of grim death. The contemplation of nature, the response to the life of animals and plants and the earth itself, affords the sole relief from the contemplation of extinction, for even by these mediocre, unworldly men and women, nature is always regarded aesthetically — as an otherness which does not require dialogue, only delight. The very food one eats is not detached from its pervasive function as a part of the natural landscape. It is only selfhood which is so detached, dry, dumb — centripetal identities unable to penetrate each other except by sudden spasms of sexual terrorism, and deriving what comfort is to be had from

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the accuracy with which they chart the downward path to acceptance, that final act which enables us to see things clearly.

"Nothing lasts. There will always be pain." With these stoic words — dispensed, in the novel, by the narrator's dentist, who is in fact his psychoanalyst — the author dismisses his reader, benumbed by art and grateful for surcease, to the world (whatever is left of it) which is not within the novels of Günter Grass. Astonishingly gifted, as everyone knows or has been told, encyclopedic in his appetites and aspirations, here is a novelist who takes great pains indeed to incorporate as much of that world as he can manage, by all the glamour of his bizarrerie, to make into one flesh. For it is a somatic process that Grass intends, a bodily making over that he envisions, and in this latest contraption of his, Dr. Frankenstein has invented a bigger and better monster than ever — largely because it is smaller, neater, the gears confined to a moderate thorax area, the flesh stitched together with more of a care for shapeliness than has characterized earlier productions from the wizard's lab.

The rhythm of Grass's novels is now discernible: The big block-buster (*The Tin Drum*), then the satyr play (*Cat and Mouse*); the sprawling fresco (*Dog Years*), then the grotesquely carved netsuke (*Local Anaesthetic*). Though it is bulked out by the publisher, it is not a long book, this clutch of alternative recitatives by a forty-year-old teacher of German and history, "the inseparable subjects," but it is so ingeniously traced and tooled, and so cunningly beveled and doweled, that the dazed reader acknowledges it to be a better mousetrap than any this pyrotechnician of *the form* has yet built. Nor can one avoid the verbs of praxis in accounting for it — no natural accretion, no sedimentation of observed detail, the book is an object lesson in the meaning of "fiction": a making, a shaping, a doing. And because he demands that we recognize his hand at work ("leaf back and find . . ." he bursts in), because we are to concede at every moment that we are in that hand ("I insisted on the pain: a cry, a lament that is never adjourned"), Grass has made the mind flesh, turned the analyst into an orthodontist, and strewn his book with quotations (real and imaginary) from Seneca, the stoic pedagogue whose concern, specifically, was with pain, the irreducible.

"I happen to believe in stories," says Eberhard, our romancing hero at the end of his, and if we couple his arrogant confession with his dentist's astonishing quotation from Nero's preceptor: "all the good things of life belong to others — time alone is ours," we have a rationale of these perverse energies which cease their buzzing and humming only in a center section of the book where the polyphony is switched off and

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a rather dim-witted political argument rehearsed. For if all the good things of life belong to other . . . novelists, time alone is left to Grass with which to tell his stories: hence the ceaseless shunting of sequences (frequently projected on the television screen by which the "dentist" beguiles his locally-anaesthetized patients), the provision of surrogate versions of past and future, interventions (not merely surgical but verbal, telephonic even) by the physician to correct the narrator when he probes too far into fantasy for his own good; history itself is brought into the act and into the action. In an endless effort to mine out guilt ("Enemy Number One is tartar. It forms a deposit that ensnares the tongue. Your tartar is your calcified hate."), Eberhard adduces the efforts of various Hitler resisters when he himself was the leader (if he is not lying again) of an anarchist youth gang in 1944; he goes back as far as the eighteenth century in Danzig, a city in which all Grass's readers are at home, and even the seventeenth in the instance of one Möller, a Boschlike painter of The Last Judgment who

> around the silly-pretty face of his betrothed placed a reflecting bell-jar which to this day asks a riddle: What is this delicate little face, rather goatlike in its narrowness and mystically blurred behind glass, doing on all that lusciously rounded flesh? (Just look at the reflections that bell-jar can give off; it mirrors everything, everything—the world and its contradictions . . .)

Again the novelist reminds us he is there, happily twitching away the iridescent tapestry and showing us the seamy side, the knots, the transitions, the broken threads. Only two writers come to mind who insist with a similar confidence on the supremacy of the aesthetic claim in their work *in their work:* Nabokov and Gadda, analogous masters of the grotesque, outrageous old men patching up their lover's quarrel with the world by language and myth. Grass, though, is a young man still, very much committed to political solutions, to bridging the generation gap he leaves, in *Local Anaesthetic,* quite unfilled. Between the desperate remedies of his argument, and the wise, the stoic submissions to helplessness of his form, there is a grotesque opposition — it makes him alive to pain, and the most indispensable witness to the truth which Nietzsche said we could not have without art.

* * *

I have not spoken of the three translators of these novels because I wish to pay them a compliment, the only compliment a translator can receive professionally: their work is imperceptible. Though I suspect that Seidensticker's job was the most exasperating, there is no question that Rabassa and Manheim, as so often before, have performed virtuoso feats of vivacity and persistence.

Richard Howard

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AMERICAN DREAMS

TOWARD A RADICAL MIDDLE: FOURTEEN PIECES OF REPORTING & CRITICISM. By Renata Adler. Random House. $7.95.

THE END OF THE AMERICAN ERA. By Andrew Hacker. Atheneum. $6.50.

THE MAKING OF AN UN-AMERICAN: A DIALOGUE WITH EXPERIENCE. By Paul Cowan. Viking. $6.95.

One of the problems with writing about the immediate past is its seeming clarity and the way it acquires a single meaning. The real past, beyond memory, is far more complex, and crisscrossed with the arguments of historians, with old paths retrod by literary, political and scientific revivals. Looking back, now, to the sixties, a number of assumptions about our experience are very firm, while the meaning of that experience may still escape us. But the need to know is compelling, hence the growing literature of "decade" evaluation.

There is no reason to believe that the sixties are any more a seminal period in American history, as Andrew Hacker argues in his new book, *The End of the American Era,* than that those ten years contain the whole of an experience. One could argue just as well that the current political and cultural mood began with James Dean in the fifties, or *Brown* v. *Board of Education,* or with Joe McCarthy, who made intellectual suicide an occupational hazard of American liberalism. But despite these objections to talking about the meaning of those years in a way we know to be subjective and perhaps even wrong, there is a necessity to do it anyway.

The last ten or fifteen years have been marked by two prominent notions among intellectuals. Many writers have felt that the essence of the period has been the eruption of hot issues through the fissures and seams of American political compromises. Current political language often sounds like a new geometry developed to measure gaps and distances between groups of people. Without a climate of compromise, politically conscious writers are more often than not compelled to take a position and hold ground as if under attack. Thus, Renata Adler, entitles her book of reportage *Toward a Radical Middle,* which says very little about her work in the sixties but quite a bit about the need to locate on the generational battlefield.

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The reinvigoration of the Left and the reemergence of sectional politics has perhaps finally doomed a dominant political metaphor of the fifties, which was based on an invidious distinction between "American" and "un-American." Today, Paul Cowan can quite seriously and fearlessly call his autobiography *The Making of an Un-American*. Obviously, much has happened, and new political positions may yet emerge.

The problem of assessing one's own past writings is often as difficult as the actual writing about one's experience. Renata Adler's fourteen pieces of reporting and criticism from 1963 to 1968, despite what she says in her introductory essay, do not amount to a defense of language and nuance, nor offer much proof that the "System" has accommodated anyone out of the ordinary in the past decade, nor that it is getting "better." In fact, Adler is a far better writer than she is a polemicist for the radical middle. Her essays simply do not add up to the position for which she claims to be a spokesman.

If anything, Adler's political position is slightly off center. At her best, as in "The March for Non-Violence from Selma," she has a marvelous eye and ear for detail and tone, and a sympathetic omnipresence recording bits of conversation, faces, movements. In the piece on Sunset Strip in Los Angeles, and the very funny report on the Washington conference of the Independent Committee to End the War in Vietnam in 1965 she adopts a half-serious acceptance of what is happening and then slowly and deftly undercuts the pretense of a Los Angeles cultural happening and a dead serious political convention. Her half-mocking, ironic tone carries the reader to the inevitable absurd conclusion. In the longest essay, "The Thursday Group," a long piece on group therapy, she recreates a fascinating group, and sustains the interaction of individuals through a series of encounters: snatches of conversation create the continuity, and the mutual dependence, intrigue and self-exposure of such a group is entirely believable. Here, as nowhere else, she comes closest to creating the kind of soap opera that expresses her tastes and her orientation in American society. But Adler's psychological soap opera, and the one she recalls watching on T.V. for two years — *Another World* — are not the same thing.

After a while, the method and point of view break down. The report on the Black Power march in Mississippi (after Selma) is a stereotyped, outsider's report dismissing white marchers as Drones, reporters as disrupters and "Black Power," as one of those at best, bad, at worst, worse, slogans. There are sympathetic sketches of Stokely Carmichael and, especially, Martin Luther King. But one has the feeling that Adler has tired of it all, sees the marches as boring and repetitive, and will not write about them anymore. This sense is even stronger in her report

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on the Palmer House meeting of Radical Blacks and whites in 1967, and the debacle of the New Politics Convention. Clearly, by then, she had had it (the no-longer-New–Left was a "vulgar joke," and able to contribute as much to discussion of problems as a "mean drunk to the workings of a fire brigade.") So much did she see this as the signal for the end of the Left, which she scores for polarizing American society, that in the end she doubts the future of New Politics at all. Of course, it was impossible then to predict the Convention of the summer of 1968, or the academic year of 1969 and 1970, and perhaps, also, to foresee that this incredibly absurd gathering would not be the last reunion of those who want to change American society radically. Adler makes much of the breakdown of language and sloganeering. This is a useful gauge for evaluating one level of political activity; but it is also the mark of most politics.

In the end, it is her sense of herself as a writer that Adler puts at the service of the "radical middle." With her stylistic weapons she draws up the defenses of her own generation. She writes herself stylistically and ideologically out of the corner of the Average American. She is closest to making sense out of the early sixties when she writes of Kennedy's politics of glamour, and farthest when she writes of World War II as the last just war of romantic possibility. Surely, from the other side, that is what the Chinese, Algerian, Cuban, Vienamese wars have been all about. Still it is language that Adler feels she is defending. But when she has finished casting her proxy for clear thought and good style, she speaks of the historical necessity of American internal reconciliation, and to prove the immense possibilities for the future, she writes of the "three of us" who have just come back from the moon. Three men did come back from the moon, but courageous as that was, it has nothing to do with preserving the bonds of social unity in America, and less with language and clarity of thought. If anything, the whole moon extravaganza proved how far we will allow language to be debased in the service of technology, with programmed surprise, historic first words and gimmicky political exploitation.

In the end, one is inevitably convinced that Renata Adler is far different from the middle class she mistakes for a radical middle. She calls her values corny; but her strain of sophistication has no more place in an Iowa cornfield than the *New Yorker,* for which her essays were written, resembles the *Prairie Farmer.* At one point she remarks, "Lacking an idiom entirely our own, we cannot adopt any single voice without a note of irony." Perhaps we must read her the same way.

Given the same experience during the last decade, political scientist

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Andrew Hacker pictures for the future a dull apocalypse and a gloomy twilight of American power. This strangely passionless prediction of disaster is sustained through eleven chapters which examine individuality, scholarship, corporations, racial tensions and politics. In every field, Hacker has it the same; the rising expectations of the lower and lower middle classes, brought on by unprecedented wealth, has led to a debasement of hierarchy in America, and the feeling of absolute equality among, he notes, unequals. The pressure that this democratic-materialism creates upon the social structure is overwhelming, to the point where all the values of social order, such as self-sacrifice, saving, asceticism, have been cast out and replaced by a kind of absolute hedonism. "Tensions and frustrations," he says, "are bound to arise when 200 million human beings demand rights and privileges never intended for popular distribution." In effect, the poor slobs who live in the suburbs have no right to think of themselves as individuals nor their dull lives as meaningful.

The subversion of order by democracy is especially disastrous (one is not surprised to find) in academics. Hacker laments the decline of good, clear, original thinking. Nothing but small minds publishing monographs, he argues, is the mark of scholarship today, and is the inevitable result of allowing more men and women into professions than their intelligence merits. And so it goes, through each aspect of American society.

Perhaps the only interesting point of this book is the discussion of the sort of order which persisted before the democratic breakdown. Answering his father, the historian, Louis Hacker, he says at first that America's distinctive political history is due to the absence of feudal institutions. But then he says that America did have a feudal psychology, with all sorts of built-in deferences, an unofficial hierarchy and a class system of learning. This is the order which Hacker now finds in decline.

Finally, Hacker indulges in a lengthy attack on the middle and lower middle classes, primarily for the unworthiness of their aspirations. There is little mention of anyone in American society with power, either political, cultural or economic. The burden for America's ills thus is made to rest upon the victims, and, of course, democracy is to blame.

By the time one has slogged through this muddy treatise, one is convinced that Hacker really doesn't care much. He lacks the wit and nostalgia to be a conservative and certainly has none of the liberal's optimism or sustained appetite for chewing on the present. If this book suggests any comparison, it is with the writings of Brooks Adams who was even more terrified of the new American. But, unlike Adams whose passion carried him from one perception to another, Hacker has written

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of American society and culture as if it were a bad student performance, to which he has given low marks.

Paul Cowan's *The Making of an Un-American* is a successful and very interesting book in spite of some abrasive moments of autobiography. Cowan, a writer for the *Village Voice,* a SNCC worker, and with his wife Rachel, a Peace Corps volunteer, recounts living the experiences which intruded into the reporting of Renata Adler and which are never quite mentioned by Andrew Hacker. They are as central to the meaning of the sixties as almost any could be, and Cowan tells them often with great skill and compelling interest.

The best part of the work is clearly the long middle section on his experience in the Peace Corps in Ecuador, telling of his struggle to master his own reactions to the experience and get up the courage to fight what he came to see as the racism and pure venom of the frustrated zealots who had joined the Peace Corps and been dumped, seemingly without purpose in an alien culture. The story is almost a conversation between himself and another, more detached, self which kept urging the absurdity of the mission, the imperialism of the program and the insensitivity of Peace Corps volunteers. Gradually, Cowan and his wife made their criticism of the Peace Corps and American foreign policy more vocal, more insistent, until they broke entirely from it. Cowan's last thought in his book is a fantasy imagining what it would have been like to be a Viet Cong invading the American Embassy in Saigon: "How I would have loved to invade that segregated building and give all the information I could find there to my government's enemy, the people." Thus the author defines himself as an opponent of America's presence abroad.

Cowan's experience in the Peace Corps strikes a true note. I happened to be visiting friends in the Peace Corps in Colombia about the same time Cowan was nearby in Ecuador. I could not help being struck by the senselessness of dropping middle-class Americans into the vast swamps of poverty filling those countries. One encountered among volunteers a variety of reactions, from open dislike for Colombians to lethargy and resignation. Stories about the American Embassy, the CIA and AID, and about the limitations which the Peace Corps placed on any possible work by the volunteers, seem to have been much the same for Colombia and Ecuador. I did know volunteers, rare perhaps, who found that the absurdities of their positions were, after all, a way of relating to the members of another culture they met, those for whom the Peace Corps experience became a test to see if they at least could survive. What they had, and what Cowan lacked, was a sense of the bitter

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humor of the situation: a Peace Corps which brought no peace, and isolated, inept young Americans without the dollars which many countries expected.

The difficulty with this otherwise good book is that it succeeds as a story about the Peace Corps, but fails as autobiography. There is a sameness in the personal story, although the author notes that he changes his mind at various points, from private school, through college, in Israel, in the South, and in Ecuador. It is hard to believe, however, that this is the story of the making of an un-American, for Cowan's attitudes at Choate were as alienated as in Colombia; he was always, in one way or another, "un-American," because he winced at racial slurs and struggled to combat his own failure to respond to such attacks. Indeed, this struggle is the central theme of the book, until Cowan finally succeeds in forcing the Peace Corps to answer his charges of racism.

Cowan's search was for a kind of moral purity, which is one characteristic odyssey of the sixties. What he wanted from Peace Corps volunteers was that they live up to the evangelical uplift with which the program was endowed by President Kennedy. Cowan simply could not get along with other volunteers, nor ultimately could he see them as victims of the racist society from which they came. His most radical action in Ecuador was to attempt a boycott by American personnel of a supermarket that discriminated against Ecuadorians, as if this was really an important project for a foreign community whose purpose in being there in the first place, as Cowan admits, was to exploit the Ecuadorians.

In the end, this is not a book about the making of an alienated American, nor, as Cowan seems to say, the confirmation of a radical. Although he strikes out at America with the passion of a moral reformer and writes a compelling story of his experiences in the Peace Corps, he does not begin to conceive of changing America or Americans. The same, democratic America he endorses at the end, sounds like an afterthought.

James Gilbert

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NOTES

JOYCE CAROL OATES has a new book out, **The Wheel of Love.** Her play, **Sunday Dinner,** is being produced by the American Place Theater. . . . MICHAEL HARRINGTON is George A. Miller Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois this fall. . . . ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR., is Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities at CUNY. . . . Beacon Press has published HOWARD ZINN's latest book, **The Politics of History.** Mr. Zinn teaches at Boston University. . . . RUSSELL BANKS is co-editor of **Lillabulero.** He recently completed a novel and put together a book of poems. . . . IRVING WEINMAN is a poet who tells us that he lives in London and also teaches at the University of Maryland. . . . GEORGE LEVINE, chairman of the English Department at Livingston College, Rutgers, says that he is "attempting ambivalently to live with educational uncertainty." . . . MAUREEN HOWARD is working on a new novel. . . . Next year, Chatto and Windus will bring out THOMAS R. EDWARDS's book, **Poetry and the Public World.** . . .Atheneum is publishing RICHARD HOWARD's latest book of poems, **Findings,** next spring. Mr. Howard will be Swiggett–Baines Distinguished Lecturer in Poetry at Princeton in 1971. . . . JAMES GILBERT teaches at Maryland.

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